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Dear Member,

NEW ZEALAND LABOUR NEWS

Unite Union Unhappy with Sky City COVID Policy

SkyCity workers are angry at the company for claiming a special leave subsidy for household contacts of COVID-19 cases, while still making those with the virus use up all their available sick leave.

One longtime SkyCity casino manager said it was “frustrating” that management was differentiating between the two, making it more likely that staff who have been made to use all their sick leave because of COVID-19 would risk coming into work later when unwell because they couldn’t afford to be unpaid.

Unite Union organiser Mike Treen said the union had written to SkyCity in January seeking assurance sick leave would not be taken from workers in light of “impending widespread Omicron infections,” adding, “No explanation was being offered as to why this was happening.”

A SkyCity spokeswoman said, as one of many large companies significantly impacted by the Omicron outbreak, it intended to apply for the COVID-19 Leave Support Scheme, which offsets employer costs for workers who contract the virus or had to self-isolate, rather than being passed on to individual employees directly.



(Newstalkzb)

Treen said the union was told sick leave would be “restored” if used once the subsidy was received, however, that promise had “proved a naive hope.” SkyCity was using the pandemic as an excuse to scrub large sums of sick leave, lieu days or annual leave accrued throughout the past two years, he said.

In an email, SkyCity claimed that leave payments “only partially covered” the financial impact of an employee who was unable to work due to COVID-19. “SkyCity feels that it is entirely reasonable that employees use their existing sick leave allocations first before compassionate leave is provided.”

MBIE National Manager of Labour Inspectorate Stu Lumsden said employee entitlements to leave and pay were “complex to navigate” and changed rapidly due to COVID-19. “One of the key challenges is working out employee entitlements to leave when the worker cannot go to the workplace or work from home.”

SkyCity said the recent increase in statutory sick leave from five days to 10 would provide additional cover for employees experiencing the usual winter illnesses on top of COVID-19. "SkyCity will continue to support staff who are unable to work during this time."



E tu Union Win at NZ Starch

E tu members at NZ Starch had high expectations for pay increases when they went into bargaining last year. While the company also wanted to lift wages in order to attract skilled workers who would stay, their proposal to roll up some allowances and add a significant boost to base rates was not meeting members' needs.

So early this year, NZ Starch members voted unanimously for an overtime ban during several weekends. Given the critical role of NZ Starch in the supply chain, and staffing pressures due to workers being off to isolate, the actions caused significant disruption.

As a result of their actions, members have now ratified the settlement, which includes no less than 5 per cent with full backpay for 2021, with many workers getting base rates increased between \$5 and \$7 per hour. They also secured 6 per cent on their new rates from 1 August this year.

E tu delegate John said, "We know we needed a good start rate to bring in new workers and fill vacancies, and members could not keep doing as much overtime as we had been doing before our ban. But we wanted to make sure our members still earn a good living without all the overtime. We won all of this with our new deal!"

Vaccinate Mandate Lifted for Education Workers

The Government's decision to remove vaccine mandates as of 5 April for education workers comes as no surprise, says New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) Te Wehengarua President Melanie Webber.

"PPTA's support of the mandates stemmed from our policy, led by members, that we would support public health advice around COVID-19. We supported the mandates as the best means of keeping teachers, students, and their communities, particularly the vulnerable, safe against a raging and deadly global pandemic. For us, the mandates were always about protecting ourselves but equally importantly trying to prevent young children, elderly and those who are immunocompromised, from being infected.



(PPTA)

"While the vast majority of secondary teachers were vaccinated before the mandates were introduced, the requirement meant that vaccination rates across the education sector rose significantly, and we are now at the stage where the mandates have done their job and are not needed any longer. The removal of them is a decision that has been made based on the best public health advice. However, this does not mean a return to any sense of normality at the moment."

Webber said the mandates had been extremely difficult for the relatively small number of secondary teachers who chose not to be vaccinated, but "with teacher shortages continuing in secondary, it is likely that many of these teachers will be able to find new jobs in education now they are able to return."

She said schools will also need to support staff, particularly those who are immuno-compromised or have underlying health conditions, who feel anxious about working alongside unvaccinated people." They are hoping for clear national guidelines that schools can follow.

"The mandates are just one element of the huge disruption COVID-19 has wreaked in school life over the last two years. Teachers have risen swiftly and impressively to the challenges of COVID-19 but there is no doubt the pandemic has really taken its toll on students and teachers. Hopefully there will be light at the

end of the tunnel soon.”



Save Our Rails Campaign

In December, KiwiRail announced the permanent end of same-day intercity services between Auckland/Wellington and Picton/Christchurch, to be replaced by a multi-day rail cruise.

This announcement effectively means the end of most of Aotearoa New Zealand's national passenger rail network after more than 100 years of service.

The **Rail and Maritime Union (RMTU)** is calling on the government and KiwiRail to commit to maintaining existing intercity passenger rail services, and for a comprehensive national strategy for future passenger rail services built around concerns for climate action, accessibility, and economic development.

Trains have an important place in our future but require investment and planning from the government. Here are some reasons why:

- * Rail provides a more sustainable and climate friendly method of transport across the country.
- * Rail can invigorate the social and economic life of small communities by making them accessible to remote workers and tourists.
- * Trains can bring our diverse country together by connecting them to people and landscapes across wide distances.
- * Trains provide an accessible method of point-to-point transport for the elderly, disabled people, and people without cars.
- * With the right government support trains can provide affordable transport for people on low-income.
- * Less cars on the roads can help to make our roads safer.

While rail tours are still far better for the economy and environment than flying to Hawai'i, however, they are not an appropriate replacement for a national passenger rail network. It should not be one or the other.

Rail is an important part of our past, but it should also be part of our future.

DHBs Fail Allied Health Professionals

Ten thousand **Public Service Association (PSA)** allied, public health, scientific and technical workers are still waiting for an acceptable collective agreement offer from DHBs.

Negotiations, which began in mid-March, are facilitated by the Employment Relations Authority, which will release its formal, non-binding recommendations in due course.



Occupational therapist Dianna said, "It is completely incomprehensible that the government won't treat us fairly. Everyone knows the conditions health professionals are working under at the moment - to the extent that some DHBs have offered up to \$750 extra pay per shift to some health professionals to cover shortages during the peak of Omicron."

PSA organiser Will Matthews said, "The Employment Relations Authority recommendations may mean we can resolve this dispute - we hope it will - but we need to consider industrial action if it doesn't. The government must provide DHBs with a mandate to settle this dispute." Allied health workers will vote on strike action soon.

Health workers deserve fair pay! Sign **The Petition**

Employers and Employees Face Uncertainty With Long COVID



(Newsroom.Co.Nz)

According to data from the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) fewer than half a dozen people are currently receiving support for long COVID symptoms in New Zealand, a condition involving long-term health effects of having been infected by the coronavirus.

Nevertheless, a quarter of UK employers say long COVID is one of the main reasons staff are away sick for long periods of time, which commonly causes fatigue among other systems.

Auckland-based employment lawyer Barbara Buckett says employers will be going in blind when it comes to managing uncertainties around employees with long COVID, and how to handle it compared to other long-term illnesses.

In some situations, Buckett says medical incapacity may come into play, where a worker is unable to do their job due to an illness or injury and it is within the employer's rights to terminate the person's employment. Is it any different from any other long-term illness, and do the same rules apply? Or does the legal and contractual framework have to look to alternatives? I don't know the answer to that."

New Zealand health economics professor Paula Lorgelly, who is involved in a massive long COVID clinical study led by the University College London NHS Trust in the UK, said long COVID presents a raft of unknowns, as each person shows different symptoms and it's not clear how to treat it.

In the UK, employers are easing sick staff back into work by making appropriate adjustments, such as working from home, working fewer or different hours, or doing a different role.

It is different from treating COVID-19 itself, for which there is now established medication said Lorgelly. "We don't know how to treat these people and the health system probably doesn't have the resources to treat them all ... I spoke to many long COVID patients and none of them are the same. It might be that the symptoms can be managed for some by working at home, being flexible, and adapting their work. But you can't do that for others" such as a supermarket checkout worker who might get the short end of the stick when it comes to keeping their job."



NIHI Long COVID Information
[\(CLICK\)](#)

ACC Acting Chief Operating Officer Gabrielle O'Connor says the organisation provides cover for illnesses such as COVID-19 when there is sufficient evidence that the person contracted the virus while in the workplace, or performing a work-related task. A person's vaccine status is not taken into account when considering ACC cover or entitlement.

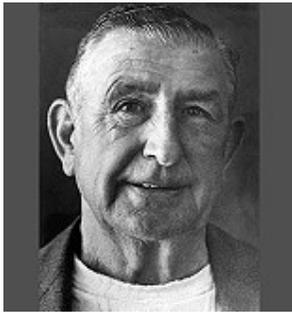
First Union General Secretary Dennis Maga said employers should provide discretionary leave for staff who've been affected by long COVID, he said. "A pandemic should not provide employers an excuse to drive down sick and annual leave balances, and any good employer should embrace their ability to support workers who are dealing with this unprecedented illness."

The Ministry of Innovation, Business, and Employment Policy Director Tracy Mears says employees should talk to their boss about the impact that any illnesses might have on their ability to do their job. "We encourage employers and employees to consult their employment agreement, discuss, and seek to reach agreement in good faith on what approach will be taken."

Anniversary of Trades Hall Bombing and Death of Ernie Abbott

26 March marked the 27th anniversary of the 1984 suitcase bombing of Wellington Trades Hall that took the life of Ernie Abbott. No prosecution was ever taken and nearly 40 years later it's unlikely to ever be solved.

Former CTU President Helen Kelly knew Ernie well. In one of the last interviews before her death she talked about the climate of fear and hatred that was being



(NZCTU)

stoked against the union movement at the time.

"[It was] just this absolute sort of anti-Communist, anti-socialist, anti-reds under the bed hysteria which was really designed to shut down trade unions and discredit them.

"It was run by Muldoon - and it was vicious, and people were being forced to be sort of scared of trade unions and to see them as a threat," she said. "And it got worse and worse, and it was this sort of war of words at that stage - and then suddenly, someone put a bomb in the Trades Hall."

NZCTU asks you to take a moment to remember Ernie and to mark this dark period in our collective.

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR NEWS

Amazon Workers in NYC Vote to Unionise in Historic Labour Win

United States, New York. As reported by the Associated Press.

Amazon workers in Staten Island, New York, voted to unionise on Friday, marking the first successful U.S. organising effort in the retail giant's history and handing an unexpected win to a nascent group that fueled the union drive.

Warehouse workers cast 2,654 votes - or about 55% - in favor of a union, giving the newly formed **Amazon Labor Union** enough support to pull off a victory. According to the National Labor Relations Board, which is overseeing the process, 2,131 workers - or 45% - rejected the union bid.

The independent group, made up of former and current workers who lacked official backing from an established union were out-gunned by the deep-pocketed retail giant. Despite obstacles, organisers believed their grassroots approach was more relatable to workers and could help them overcome where established unions have failed in the past. They were right.

The organising campaign was led by Chris Smalls, a fired Amazon employee. He and other organisers came out of the National Labor Relations Board building in Brooklyn on Friday with other union organisers, pumping fists and chanting "ALU." Smalls hailed the victory as a call to arms for other Amazon workers across the sprawling company. "I hope that everybody's paying attention now because a lot of people doubted us," he said.

Smalls hopes the success in New York will embolden workers at other facilities to launch their own organising campaigns. This group will shift their attention to a neighboring Amazon warehouse on Staten Island, where a separate union election is scheduled to be held in late April. Organisers believe Friday's win is going to make it easier for them to win there, too.



Former Amazon supervisor Christian Smalls formed the ALU after being fired in March 2020
(Ed Jones/AFP)

Amazon posted a statement on its company website Friday saying that it was evaluating its options following the election.

"We're disappointed with the outcome of the election in Staten Island because we believe having a direct relationship with the company is best for our employees," the post said. "We're evaluating our options, including filing objections based on the inappropriate and undue influence by the NLRB that we and others (including the National Retail Federation and U.S. Chamber of Commerce) witnessed in this election."

The company did not elaborate but it signaled it might challenge the election based on a lawsuit filed in March by the NLRB, which sought to force Amazon to reinstate a fired employee who was involved in the

union drive.

NLRB spokesperson Kayla Blado responded to Amazon's statement by noting that the independent agency has been authorised by Congress to enforce the National Labor Relations Act. "All NLRB enforcement actions against Amazon have been consistent with that Congressional mandate," she said.

Mark Cohen, Director of Retail Studies at Columbia University, said he doesn't see how workers will benefit from a unionised Amazon facility and called the overall push to unionise companies misguided. He said that Amazon is a "highly disciplined and regimented" business willing to pay premium wages and good benefits, but it also demands tremendous output from its workers who work 10-hour shifts.

"Amazon is not going to change their culture because there is now a union in their midst," Cohen said. "They might be forced to let people work eight hours but those people will make less money."

The successful union effort on Staten Island stood in contrast to the one launched in Bessemer, Alabama by the more established Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. Workers at an Amazon warehouse there appeared to have rejected a union bid but outstanding challenged ballots could change the outcome. The votes were 993-to-875 against the union. A hearing to review 416 challenged ballots is expected to begin in the next few days.

The union campaigns come at a time of widespread labour unrest at many corporations. Workers at more than 140 Starbucks locations around the US, for instance, have requested union elections and several of them have already been successful.

But Amazon has long been considered a top prize for the labour movement given the company's massive size and impact. The results in Staten Island reverberated all the way to the White House.

"The president was glad to see workers ensure their voices are heard with respect to important workplace decisions," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said at Friday's briefing about the vote. "He believes firmly that every worker in every state must have a free and fair choice to join a union and the right to bargain collectively with their employer."



(mindlivetv.)

John Logan, Director of Labour and Employment Studies at San Francisco State University, said the union win was a potential tipping point two years into a pandemic that has shifted the labour landscape.

"We knew that unions were having a moment, but this is much bigger," Logan said "There is no bigger prize than organising Amazon."

He added that the ALU's win defies traditional thinking that only national unions can take on big companies. But the group might still have a fight ahead of it, according to Erin Hatton, a sociology professor at the University

of Buffalo in New York.

"Getting Amazon to the bargaining table will be another feat altogether," Hatton said. "Oftentimes the union will fizzle out because the company doesn't come to the bargaining table in good faith as they're obliged to do."

Rebecca Givan, professor of Labour Studies at Rutgers University, said the victory is just the first step in a likely protracted battle against Amazon. "It's clear Amazon will keep fighting, they're not conceding that workers have a right to organise," she said. "It looks like the legal questions they've raised this afternoon suggest they're trying to undermine the entire authority of NLRB."

Both labour fights faced unique challenges. Alabama, for instance, is a right-to-work state that prohibits a company and a union from signing a contract that requires workers to pay dues to the union that represents them.

The union landscape in Alabama is also starkly different from New York. Last year, union members accounted for 22.2 per cent of wage and salary workers in New York, ranked only behind Hawaii, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. That's more than double the national average of 10.3 per cent. In Alabama, it's 5.9 per cent.

Amazon workers in Staten Island are seeking longer breaks, paid time off for injured employees and an hourly wage of \$30, up from a minimum of just over \$18 per hour offered by the company. The estimated average wage for the borough is \$41 per hour, according to a similar U.S. Census Bureau analysis of Staten Island's \$85,381 median household income.

Tristan Dutchin, who began working for the online retailer about a year ago, is hopeful that the new union will improve working conditions at his job site. "I'm excited that we're making history," Dutchin said. "This will be a fantastic time for workers to be surrounded in a better, safer working environment."

Nail Salon Workers Are Exploited, But A New Bill Can Change That *United States, New York. As reported by [PerfectUnion.us](https://perfectunion.us)*

In New York, a greedy industry takes advantage of skilled **nail salon workers**. The majority immigrant workforce faces low wages, non-existent benefits, erratic schedules, hazardous chemicals, and rampant wage theft.

Adhikaar, a New York-based nonprofit organising Nepali-speaking community to promote human rights and social justice, and other allies have been pushing for years to get stronger protections for nail salon workers. Their movement has won several victories since 2015, when a New York Times report exposed the horrific conditions and widespread wage theft in the industry.



(Flickr)

But these reforms haven't gone far enough. Manicurists say workplace conditions still jeopardise their health. And according to a 2020 survey, 82 per cent of nail salon workers experience wage theft. On average stolen wages amounted to \$10,000 per year.

State Senator Jessica Ramos wants to put a stop to the long-term exploitation of these workers. New legislation called the Nail Salon Minimum Standards Council Act could deliver a safer workplace and better lives for thousands of NYC nail salon workers who have struggled in the shadows.

The bill could also serve as a model for other industries where workers aren't able to negotiate with big employers.

New Deal for Canadian Workers Means a Better Future for All *Canada, Ontario. As reported by the IAMAW*

The **International Association of Machinists** (IAM) applauds the NDP, New Democratic Party in Canada, in leveraging its power and entering a supply-and-confidence agreement with the Liberals. It's encouraging to see political parties putting people above politics when so much is at stake for Canada. As we begin to rebuild the Canadian economy, a pragmatic approach to politics and an eye on passing progressive policies is exactly what Canadians need. "Under this arrangement, said David Chartrand, General Vice-President for IAM Canada, "we are hopeful that worker's issues will finally get the attention they deserve, after all, supporting workers is critical to the post-pandemic recovery. This is one of the positive effects of our many years of lobbying federal politicians on these very issues."

The statement of principles, Delivering for Canadians Now, A Supply and Confidence Agreement, settled on by the Liberals and the NDP, represents another step towards making Canada the country we all aspire to. We congratulate the leadership of both parties, who looked beyond political posturing and kept their focus on delivering programs that will support working families. The new agreement lasts until Parliament rises in June 2025 and a



(Flickr)

new election will take place.

“It is in the best tradition of Tommy Douglas, the father of medicare and Jack Layton, who reached a deal on affordable housing, that Jagmeet Singh and the NDP have once again shown that the party representing working people can help make real change in the lives of Canadians,” added Chartrand.

The deal covers a lot of numerous critical issues affecting Canadians, including:
* key areas affecting workers, including banning scabs from federally-regulated unionised workplaces and 10 paid sick days for federally-regulated workers

* ensuring a national daycare program is put into effect

* affordable housing, including improvement to the Canada Housing Benefit and a “Homebuyer’s Bill of Rights”

addressing climate change and a just transition

* continuing a commitment to Reconciliation, including burial searches at the former sites of residential schools, affordable housing and policies concerning missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG).

* changing taxation for financial institutions that have made large profits during the pandemic

* expanding voter participation, improvements to mail-in ballots, and a commitment to ensuring that Quebec doesn’t lose representation in the House of Commons.

“Worker’s issues have been on the back burner for far too long”, said David Chartrand. “Today’s announcement marks a historical moment, one in which issues of working Canadians are finally on the table.”

Rebuilding after the pandemic demands that we work together, address shortcomings in our economy, uplift our most vulnerable and move forward together. This arrangement indicates that government got it right, and is moving in the right direction- it’s a direction we’re on board with.

Our work now begins. We look forward to working with government and other stakeholders to build an economy that works for all of us.

Activists and Supporters of the Left Front, Indian National Congress and Trade Unions Organized a Nationwide Two-day Strike in India

India. As reported by the Associated Press.

Millions of workers began a nationwide two-day strike across India on 28 March to express their anger at the government’s economic policies and press their demands for improved rights for industrial workers, employees and farmers.



(AP)

About a dozen labour unions that organised the strike want the government to provide universal social security coverage for workers in the vast unorganised sector, hike the minimum wage under a flagship employment guarantee program and stop the privatisation of public-sector banks.

The strikers are also demanding that the government halt plans to sell state assets.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government says privatising some state-owned banks would overhaul the banking industry and that asset sales would help raise money to spur economic growth.

The strike had little impact in India’s capital, New Delhi, and the financial hub of Mumbai, but daily life was affected elsewhere, including southern Kerala, where the state government led by the opposition Communist Party of India backed the protest. In some states, demonstrators blocked highways and railroad tracks, affecting public transportation.

The **All Indian Trade Union Congress**, one of the country’s largest trade unions, said it expected more

than 200 million formal and informal workers would join the strike, but the figure could not be independently verified.

The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, an important trade union affiliated with the governing Bharatiya Janata Party, said it wouldn't participate in the strike, calling it "politically motivated."

Essential services related to banking, transportation, railways and electricity were expected to be impacted in several states. A number of public-sector banks, including India's largest lender, the state-run State Bank of India, said banking services may be affected because many employees were expected to join the strike.

India's economy has bounced back after experiencing a major blow during the first two years of the pandemic. But many jobs have disappeared, with unemployment rising to 8% in December.

Modi's government grappled last year with huge farmer protests demanding the repeal of new agriculture laws it had billed as necessary reforms.

The protests by farmers, who feared the laws would dramatically reduce their incomes, forced Modi to make a rare retreat just ahead of crucial state elections that his party eventually won.

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