



August 2022, Vol. 13 No. 7

TERRY O'SULLIVAN President, Laborers' International Union of North America; Chairman, AIL Labour Advisory Board

LORI PELLETIER Division Vice President, Public Relations, American Income Life Division; Executive Director, AIL Labour Advisory Board

STEVE GREER Chief Executive Officer, American Income Life Division; President, AIL Labour Advisory Board

SUSAN FULDAUER Division Vice President, Public Relations, American Income Life Division; Secretary, AIL Labour Advisory Board

ROGER SMITH Chairman Emeritus, American Income Life Insurance Company

DENISE BOWYER Secretary Emeritus, AIL Labour Advisory Board

STEVE FRIEDLANDER State General Distributor, American Income Life Insurance Company

[Sign Up for AIL's New Zealand Labour News](#)



Dear Member,

NEW ZEALAND LABOUR NEWS

Auckland Bus Drivers' Pay Boosted Amid Staffing Shortage

Auckland Council announced an immediate wage increase 28 July for the city's bus drivers to try and boost its staff numbers. The average increase will be 8 per cent, bringing the average wage up from \$23.71 to \$25.62 per hour.

It comes after continued bus service cancellations across the city amid staffing shortages and winter sickness. Auckland Transport (AT) said it was confident further wage rises would be possible later this year.

Mayor Phil Goff described the move as "critical to overcoming a shortfall in driver numbers," adding that ensuring the network was funded to be fully staffed would make it more reliable, so more people would use it.

"More people on buses means less congestion, less pollution and reduced carbon emissions," he said. "It helps recognise the importance of the job and the responsibilities our drivers have."

AT's Group Manager of Metro Services Darek Koper agreed that the move was needed to address staffing levels, saying the change was an important step that would increase the attractiveness of bus driving as a career, adding that "bus drivers have been paid lower wages compared to the rest of the transport industry for quite some time."

Koper said Auckland is close to 500 bus drivers short, while noting that it was a global problem and more action was definitely needed. "We are aware that public transport operators from Australia have been recruiting in New Zealand for bus drivers."

The pay boost was decided in consultation with bus drivers unions, including **FIRST and Tramways unions**, which described the boost as "significant and meaningful," but only a "first step."

AT's interim Chief Executive Mark Lambert confirmed the decision's timing was influenced by inflation. "Bus drivers are the backbone of the transport system in Auckland, carrying tens of thousands of people



(iNews)

each day. We know further increases will be needed to address the rising cost of living."

Three Biggest Unions Ask NZers To Vote For Climate

With a combined membership of 186,000, the country's three biggest unions, **NZNO Toputanga Tapuhi Kaitiaki o Aotearoa**, **NZEI Te Riu Roa** and the **PSA Te Pukenga Here Tikanga Mahi**, are supporting Vote Climate, the campaign to get voters to support local government candidates who will invest in reducing transport emissions.

The campaign brings together 30 different groups including unions, climate action activists, public transport, walking groups, and cycling groups, all lobbying politicians to reduce the country's CO2 emissions from transport.



The Vote Climate campaign is asking local government candidates to commit to:

- * More frequent public transport services in cities and towns, and between centres and across regions.
- * More affordable public transport: Increased trialing of reduced fare or free services to encourage and broaden uptake.
- * Investment in infrastructure to make cycling and walking safer and easier.
- * More inter-city and regional public transport: Investing in train and bus services that make travel between cities, towns and regions easier.

PSA National Secretary Duane Leo said, "Transport policy, and the decisions that local body politicians make about it, affect us all. It impacts how we get to work, where new homes are built, and how much we have to put aside from our pay packets to afford it. Transport produces 27 per cent of our nation's CO2 emissions. It is in all our interests to make alternative ways of getting around easier and to vote for people who will take action to make it happen."

NZEI Te Riu Roa President Liam Rutherford said, "We know that it is getting harder and harder for tamariki and whanau to get by. One really practical way we can address that is frequent and more affordable public transport. In doing so we can simultaneously help reduce traffic congestion, in turn helping us all breathe a little easier."

NZNO Toputanga Tapuhi Kaitiaki o Aotearoa Chief Executive Paul Goulter said an affordable and easily accessed public transport system is essential to achieving a low carbon future, as is ensuring public transport workers receive wages and working conditions that match their skills and their critical contribution to addressing climate change.

"Local Government has a big role to play in ensuring a Just Transition for working people impacted by climate change. We also want to see a commitment to reduce emissions in all sectors, including in health, and for that to be publicly taken on by Te Whatu Ora," said Goulter.

You can support the campaign at www.voteclimate.org.nz

Timber Workers Strike For Better Pay

Workers at Nelson timber processing plant South Pine made the snap decision to strike on 25 July to fight for pay that is locally competitive and will attract and retain staff at the sawmill.

Around 60 **E tu** and **FIRST Union** members at South Pine demonstrated outside their Quarantine Rd site, saying the company's current offer is unacceptable in the face of extraordinarily high living costs and wage rates offered by other companies in the industry.

"Over the last three years, workers' wages have lost significant ground against other local employers and have not kept up with the pace of inflation," said FIRST Union Southern Region Secretary Paul Watson. "With inflation now running at 7.3 per cent, members need to see wages paid at a significantly



higher level than the 6.25 per cent offered by the employer over the next 12 months."

(SaraHollyman/NelsonApp)

FIRST Union delegate and machine operator at South Pine Nick Jenkins said he has worked for the company for roughly 13 years and says the past few weeks has "just been going backwards. The biggest problem is there is no recognition for long-service. There's guys that have been here 15-20 years and they're earning just above the minimum wage. Those guys are being asked to train new team members who are paid almost the same rate."

EU organiser Garth Elliot said that many workers and experienced trades staff had left the firm to take up higher paid jobs. "The company itself has admitted it is struggling to hire new staff."

"Start rates should be at least at the new Living Wage, and we need pay parity for trades staff such as fitters, engineers and saw doctors in order to be more competitive with comparable roles at other timber-processing companies," said Elliot.

Jenkins says a typical week would see them working more than 55 hours, with a lot of the team doing overtime just to make ends meet, but they're just not getting what they're worth. "We are so short staffed, if someone leaves or gets COVID or something, they all do extra work but nobody gets recognised for it."

He says the strike would cause a back-up in the supply chain including local Bunnings and Mitre 10 stores, which would have a flow-on effect. "No one wants this but we're doing it as a last resort, and it's only over a 1.5 per cent pay rise."

A union member who wished to remain anonymous said people are feeling very frustrated. "We feel like we've been given the runaround. We're the busiest we've ever been, and the company has done very well over the last three years. We're working hard to meet market demand but we're not getting recognised for it."

South Pine general manager Romon Spiers said they are disappointed in the strike action. "Obviously we're disappointed, we're still in the process of good-faith negotiations."



(MUNZ)

Transport Unions Call For Restart of Marsden Point Refinery

The **Maritime Union of New Zealand** and the **Rail and Maritime Transport Union**, which together represent thousands of workers in the ports, shipping and rail sectors, are urging that the Marsden Point refinery be returned to functioning status -- if necessary, through Government ownership.

The privately-owned Marsden Point facility ceased refining crude oil earlier this year but is still intact and is being modified into a storage facility.

Rail and Maritime Transport Union General Secretary Wayne Butson said the closure of Marsden Point, driven by the short-term interests of fuel companies who owned the refinery, has left New Zealand exposed and has undermined fuel security for New Zealand.

Ironically, profits for fuel companies from fuel refining have soared this year. Butson said Marsden Point could be upgraded to refine New Zealand-produced crude oil, and this could keep essential services functioning in the case of emergency.

Both Unions have actively promoted rail and shipping transport modes, which are comparatively low emission.

"We need low emission transport and decarbonisation, but we also need fuel security in the short to medium term transition period," said Butson.

Maritime Union of New Zealand National Secretary Craig Harrison said the volatility of global fuel prices

and supply chains are making the closure of the refinery look even more of a bad idea. "Supply chain disruption is the new normal and ongoing COVID, global conflict and security threats means New Zealand is dangerously exposed."

Harrison said New Zealand is now completely dependent on imported refined fuel being shipped into New Zealand ports by overseas tankers.

"Our fuel reserves are small compared to many other countries and from what we have seen in the last couple of years, the supply chain is very vulnerable to shocks," said Harrison. He added that the serious situation being faced in Europe due to disruption of gas supplies from Russia was a warning of how quickly events could unfold.

Harrison added that there are a number of potential options, including part or full Government ownership of the refinery. The Australian Government had kept two Australian refineries open by underwriting them, which was a specific response intended to ensure fuel security.

NZCTU Advocates for Workplace Support For Survivors of Assault

The **New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU)**, joined by people across the country, submitted a bill designed to provide additional support to assault survivors.

The Employment Relations Amendment Bill, for "Extended Time for Personal Grievance for Sexual Harassment," is currently before Select Committee at Parliament.



NZCTU Vice President Rachel Mackintosh said the Bill was a step towards allowing survivors sufficient time to process their situation and safely raise a personal grievance.

"This is an important development for working people, and we applaud MP Dr. Deborah Russell's continued commitment to assisting survivors."

Mackintosh said one year is still an arbitrary timeframe and would benefit from being increased further. "The NZCTU would like to see the period extended to six years as this reflects the typical timeframe allowed for most civil claims. This timeframe also acknowledges the time needed to take decisive steps and overcome the systemic obstacles faced by working people who face sexual harassment."

Mackintosh said the timeframe should also extend to survivors of workplace racial harassment. "Racial harassment is also a serious, systemic issue and should benefit from this extension. All working people who are subjected to an imbalance of power at work must have their needs addressed equitably."

Wages Of Working People Not Matching Inflation

Despite working a record number of hours people are still not seeing real terms wage rises, said the **New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU)**.

According to the latest unemployment data from Statistics New Zealand, unemployment was 3.3 per cent, and there were 2.8 million people in work.

With 190,000 Kiwis underemployed or unemployed, there is still plenty to do before we can claim that we are at full employment.



"The labour market continues to be experienced differently by different communities. Unemployment fell for men, Maori, and Pacific peoples, but rose for women," said CTU economist Craig Renney. "The number of 15-24-year-olds not in education, employment or training rose to 12.1 per cent. Long-term unemployment continues to fall, with the number of people out of work for more than six months falling 31 per cent annually."

According to the Labour Cost Index, overall wages increased 3.4 per cent. Public sector workers had an even lower annual increase at 3 per cent.

"The increase is less than half of current inflation. More than a third of working people did not receive a pay rise last year," said Renney. "We are missing the 'wage' part of the possible wage-price spiral. The incomes of working people don't appear to be driving our current inflation rates."

Renney said today's numbers confirm the need for caution in overinterpreting our current data. "Unemployment remains low by international standards, but there may be more slack in the labour market due to the high number of people out of work with sickness. This has doubled in the past year. Wages are rising, but most workers are still behind inflation. With 190,000 Kiwis underemployed or unemployed, there is still plenty to do before we can claim that we are at full employment."

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR NEWS

AFGE Wins Organising Campaign at USDA

United States. As reported by AFGE.

Just over 800 IT Specialists and IT Support workers at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have voted to form a union with the **American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)** Union. The campaign was unique and had challenges as the workforce was remote and scattered across every state in the country. Per AFGE, coworkers did not know each other, have relationships or connections with each other.



(AFGE)

According to AFGE, because folks were so distant from each other, the agency had been implementing negative, anti-worker policies for years. The employees never spoke up or even thought to because they were isolated from one another working remotely. The employees had been getting taken advantage of. It is a clear example of what an agency can do if workers do not have a voice on the job.

AFGE was able to reach out to a remote workforce and begin building connections where there had been none. Through phone banking, sending texts, holding virtual meetings, and, most importantly, tasking activists to contact their coworkers, AFGE began to see the workforce become organised.

"They became organised under the basic principle of wanting a say in their working conditions because they saw firsthand what a difference having a seat at the table could mean," said John Dean, the lead organiser for the campaign. "This election was the workers' chance to stand up to the agency, and they did."

Turnout was very good, especially considering the workforce was remote, and more or less only heard about the election from their union and their coworkers, turnout was great.

Of those that voted, nearly all -- 70 per cent -- voted to stand with their coworkers in forming a union with AFGE. AFGE stated on their website that this is a huge victory for AFGE and the labour movement, but this is an even bigger victory for 806 IT Specialists and IT Support workers who now have a collective voice.



(flickr)

WestJet Workers In Calgary And Vancouver Reach Tentative Agreement Canada, Calgary. As reported by Unifor.

WestJet workers in Calgary and Vancouver have reached a tentative first collective agreement, avoiding any service interruptions in advance of Tuesday's strike deadline.

"This bargaining committee has worked very hard over the last nine months to negotiate this first agreement that brings long overdue wage increases and improvements to working conditions," said Scott Doherty, lead negotiator and Assistant to the National President.

Unifor Local 531 represents nearly 800 baggage service agents, customer service agents and guest service leads in Calgary and Vancouver airports after being certified in May of 2021.

Bargaining began in October 2021, and Unifor Local 531 filed for conciliation with the Canadian government on April 26, 2022. Details of the new agreement will first be presented to members at ratification meetings later this week.

"We are proud to present what we have negotiated to our members and I want to thank them for their patience, support and solidarity during what has been a long and challenging process," said Sherwin Antonio, member of Local 531's Calgary Bargaining Committee.

Climate Crisis Requires EU Law On Maximum Working Temperatures

Europe. As reported by ETUC.

Another summer of deadly heatwaves shows why Europe badly needs a law on maximum working temperatures to protect workers from the effects of climate change.

Trade unions are urging the **European Trade Union Commission** to take action after two workers collapsed and died after suffering heat stroke in Spain last week. In France, which does not have a maximum working temperature, 12 people died from heat-related work accidents in France in 2020.

Similar tragedies will become more common without legalisation on safe working temperatures.

Ordinarily, people work best at a temperature between 16°C and 24°C, according to the WHO. When temperatures rise above 30°C, the risk of workplace accidents increases by 5-7 per cent and, when temperatures exceed 38°C, accidents are between 10 per cent to 15 per cent more likely, research shows.

Dizziness, headaches and muscle cramps are early symptoms of heat stress, which can lead to vomiting, loss of consciousness and ultimately fatalities unless action is taken.

Across the EU, 23 per cent of all workers are exposed to high temperatures at least a quarter of the time, rising to 36 per cent in agriculture and industry, and 38 per cent in construction, according to Eurofound.

But a survey of ETUC affiliates found only a few European countries have legislation to keep workers safe during heatwaves, with a wide variation in limits ranging from 28 to 36 degrees:

- * Belgium: 29°C for light physical workload, 26°C for a moderately heavy physical workload, 22°C at heavy physical workload and 18°C at very heavy physical workload.
- * Hungary: 31°C for sedentary and light physical work, 29°C for moderately physical work and 27°C for heavy physical work.
- * Latvia: Maximum working temperature for indoor work of 28°C.
- * Montenegro: Maximum working temperature for outdoor work of 36°C.
- * Slovenia: The air temperature in work areas must not exceed 28 °C.
- * Spain: Maximum working temperatures for sedentary work, such as office work is 27°C, while for light work it is 25°C. These limits, however, do not apply to all types of work, nor to all workers and nor to all premises.

Amid the growing climate crisis, the ETUC is calling on the European Commission to close the gaps in protection of workers with a directive on maximum working temperatures.

The EU and national governments also need to enforce existing rules by reversing the huge cuts to the number of labour inspectors over the last decade.



(flickr)

Advice is not sufficient as evidence from the US shows precarious workers are most vulnerable to heat, with over 70 per cent of all heat-related fatalities occurring during the first week on the job.

ETUC Deputy General Secretary Claes-Mikael Ståhl said: "Heatwaves can be fatal for people working unprotected from the sun, as we've already witnessed in Spain this summer. Workers are on the frontline of the climate crisis every day and they need protections to match the ever-increasing danger from extreme temperatures.

"The weather doesn't respect national borders which is why we need Europe-wide legislation on maximum working temperatures. Politicians can't continue to ignore the danger to our most vulnerable workers from the comfort of their air-conditioned offices."

[Learn about AIL's union policy](#)

[Sign Up for AIL's New Zealand Labour News](#)

American Income Life Insurance Company · 1701 K Street, N.W., Suite 300 · Washington, D.C. 20006 ·
(202) 833-2030

Copyright © 2022 The Kelly Companies. All rights reserved.