



# Fiji Teachers Union

(THE CHILD OUR HOPE)

Newsletter

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## GREETINGS

*"Challenges are gifts that force us to search for a new center of gravity. Don't fight them. Just find a new way to stand. Our greatest glory is not in ever falling, but in rising every time we fall."* (Confucius)

Brothers and Sisters in Union, Bula Vinaka and warm greetings! Special greetings to the members who have joined the FTU family after the Annual Conference!

Welcome to the FTU family!

FTU sincerely acknowledges your commitment and support in driving the union on. Your unwavering support for the leadership has reaffirmed your resolve to persevere as a strong team to achieve our common goal.

FTU is strong. It is motivated by the strength of the membership. FTU is of the firm belief that when everything seems to be going against us, remember that the airplane takes off against the wind, not with it. We must remain steadfast in the face of all adversities.

We concluded this year's AGM and Annual Conference on a high note and we had assured members that we would reach them with Union literature. Hence, there was a need for membership drive, capacity building and addressing industrial relations issues which FTU is currently pursuing.

These paved the way for the organization of the divisional workshops, which have come at a cost, but had to be organized to disseminate information and resources.

Branch PD sessions were also conducted and these workshops were a success in terms of Union literature dissemination and attendance.

Brothers and Sisters in Union, FTU will need your continuous support in order to ensure the success of all

activities undertaken including workshops and zonal sports.

The much-awaited national budget was released in Parliament on 17th July 22. The Union noted with grave concern, the non inclusion of the long overdue annual increments and other salary adjustments. Further action is being taken on this through the disputes mechanism.

As we look forward to a host of Union activities, we anticipate your participation in all branch activities.

The Union thanks the teachers for their support in the success of the Coca-Cola Games. The Union wishes teachers and students, who will be participating in extracurricular activities like the Deans competition, scouts and primary and secondary schools football IDC, all the best! May the best prepared team win!

## INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

### Teacher Qualification

The following qualifications had rendered teachers fully qualified in the past: Certificate in Teaching - Primary; Diploma in Education- Primary/Secondary; Bachelor of Education- Primary; Degree in Secondary teaching subjects attained by primary school teachers; Degree plus PGCE/ GCED/PGDE; and Degree plus STTC or DTT. However, when the secondary, HoS positions were advertised the following qualifications were deemed inadequate: Degree plus STTC; Degree plus DTT; and primary trained teachers upgraded to secondary. The case is now before the Employment Court.

Meanwhile, PS is now writing to DTT and IDTT qualification holders to complete GCED or Diploma in teaching secondary, adding that the former qualifications are not suitable for secondary. The Union is of the firm belief that DDT very well covers all requirements of teacher training. It was approved and fully recognized by MEHA until this recent unjustified decision by those currently in charge. We are confident that the case in the Employment Court on behalf the HoS will settle this matter for good.

### **Log of Claims- MEHA**

A Log of Claims was submitted to pay acting allowances, payment of correct graduate salary of \$26,283.00, as per the 2017 JEE, review of employment contracts, payment of pending annual merit increase from 2019 to 2021, and a 10% across the board adjustment to address the CPI, plus other remuneration related matters. The case is before the Arbitration Court.

### **Log of Claims- FNU**

A Log of Claims was submitted to FNU on the following:

- (i) A 10% across the board increase based on the current CPI;
- (ii) Review of the employment contracts to read, 'renewal/non-renewal by mutual agreement';
- (iii) Renewal subject to performance based on open, objective and transparent assessment process at least six months prior to expire; and
- (iv) The Union to be engaged in negotiations at least one month before any redundancy is contemplated.

The matter has been referred to the Arbitration Court to seek redress. The Log of Claims was sent on 19th April and filed in the Arbitration Court in June. A hearing date is awaited.

### **Compassionate Leave**

The Union had filed a dispute on the withdrawal of this provision. The simple reason for allocation of these three days for teachers only was to enable them to utilize it for urgent personal matters including attending to seek family members. Other civil servants can take days off from their 21 days of annual leave. In the 2018 budget (prior to the elections), family care leaves of five days were announced. We then rested the case. However, this was reduced to two then one and finally nil. Teachers were compelled to take leave without pay even to sit exams at the university or to attend their own graduation. The Union is glad that teachers have now been given three days leave to attend to their family need. The Union had issued a press release in The Fiji Times. The Union was in the process of re-activating our case with the dispute mechanism. The reinstatement announced during the budget address the Union believes, is in response to this.

### **Disciplinary Process**

The Union notes with disappointment that the HR section continues to harass teachers on trivial complaints. The Union has received numerous complaints regarding the incompetence and subjective approach of the investigating officers. Teachers are

working under constant threats and stress, knowing that the unexpected can eventuate anytime.

The Union has been consistently expressing concern, on the 'judge jury and executioner' mode. We maintain that all allegations reported must be investigated objectively by independent and competent panel and then referred to the Public Service Disciplinary Tribunal for fair hearing. Honourable Minister had assured the union about improving the competency of the panels. She had also agreed that teachers would not be on the panel, but it was not honoured. Sadly, unsigned letters are being entertained again.

### **STTC AND DTT**

The Union has been informed that teachers are receiving letters from MEHA that it does not recognize qualifications which were accepted and endorsed by MEHA. Two major concerns are those teachers who have Secondary Teacher Training certificate from FCAE and Diploma in Tertiary Teaching from FNU. The case is being pursued through the industrial mechanism.

### **FIJI TEACHERS CONFEDERATION RESPONSE TO THE 2022 - 2023 NATIONAL BUDGET**

The Confederation noted with deep concern that there is no provision in the budget for annual merit increment as stipulated in the Job Evaluation Agreement of 2017. This is the fourth year teachers have been denied the upward movement to the next step they have earned. The Union made submissions to the Permanent Secretary for Economy. The Unions claim of the payment of all four increments due plus a 10% adjustment to address the CPI is also before the Arbitration Court. The Union is confident of a positive outcome. Members will note that all teachers should have been on step 4 of the scale by now, for example, those on Band E Step 1 - \$19,041.00 should be on Step 4 - \$24,412.00. Please refer to attached salary scale table for full information.

### **Graduate Salary**

The Job Evaluation Exercise 2017 put all graduates on Step 3- Band F, which is \$26,283.00. In 2018, MEHA and the Ministry for Civil Service unilaterally did a new remuneration guideline and brought it down to Step 1 - \$22,528.00. The Union has been pursuing this for the past four years. Assurances were given by the former Minister that this would be addressed but it never eventuated. The anomaly is a very serious one. New graduates, who were recruited at the beginning of 2017, were placed on Step 3 - \$26,283.00. Teachers with Diploma qualification with several years of experience

upgraded their qualification to Degree level in 2018, and they were placed on Step 1 - \$22,528.00. The adjustment announced in the budget must be backdated to the respective years they were recruited. This matter is also before the Arbitration Court and the Union will ensure that the members are paid the arrears.

**The officers have been short charged as follows:**

2018 recruits - \$26,283.53 - \$22,528.74 x 4 =  
**\$15,019.16**

2019 recruits - \$26,283.53 - \$22,528.74 x 3 =  
**\$11,264.37**

2020 recruits - \$26,283.53 - \$22,528.74 x 2 =  
**\$7509.58**

2021 recruits - \$26,283.53 - \$22,528.74 = **\$3754.79**

2022 recruits - \$26,283.53 - 22528.74 = \$3754.79 /  
26 x 15 = **\$2166.22**

### **Contracts Extended to Five Years**

The short-term contracts of four months to one year are now being extended to five years. Interestingly, just weeks before the budget announcement, MEHA was adamant on reducing five-year contracts to one year upon renewal. Some were put on four months contract and are now without jobs. The Union filed an industrial dispute on this matter as well and is persistently pursuing the removal of contractual appointments and reinstatement of tenure. The announcement of contract renewal for up to five years was made by the Minister for Economy during the 2022-23 budget sessions. Interestingly, a similar assurance was given in 2018 but not honoured. The Union's position is that contracts must be abolished and tenure be restored.

### **FNPF REDUCTION**

The Union had been calling upon the State to revert to the full contribution of 18% to enable workers to have a decent retirement pension. Unfortunately, the 2022-23 budget did not include this. The accumulated loss in the long term will be quite substantial, while Government, being the largest employer, will save millions. It should also be noted that the reduction in employers' contribution is effectively a pay cut. The Union's demand is immediate restoration with payment of full amount owed into members FNPF accounts.

### **IN-SERVICE TRAINING**

A mere 160 places have been allocated to scholarships. This is grossly inadequate. A large number of the 13,000 plus teachers teaching in rural and maritime zones

deserve leave with pay to upgrade their qualifications. Hon. Premila Kumar recently announced that teachers would be given study awards for the final semester towards completing their degree. She obviously isn't aware that previously teachers became eligible to apply for in-service training after completing 50% of the course. This was stopped over a decade ago.

### **CAPACITY BUILDING LEADERS WORKSHOP - SOUTH WEST, NORTH WEST AND NORTH**

Three empowerment workshops were conducted to empower membership at grass-root level. These workshops took place in Nadi, Rakiraki and Labasa. The workshops were resounding success in terms of attendance as well as participation. It was indeed heartening to see the sisters in large numbers. Members were enlightened on the industrial relations matters as well as union and CTCL services. The South West workshop was conducted on May 21st at Blue Light Hotel (Nadi) and was attended by members from Nadroga, Nadi and Lautoka. The North West workshop was conducted on June 4th at Tanoa International Hotel (Rakiraki) and was attended by members from Rakiraki, Tavua and Ba. The Northern Divisional Workshop was held on Saturday 6th August in Labasa and was attended by close to 100 members from Savusavu, Bua, Taveuni and Labasa.

### **FIJI TEACHERS CONFEDERATION**

The Fiji Teachers Confederation has been discussing and working on numerous common issues of concern. FTU and our sister Union (FTA) jointly filed the action on behalf of the Technical College staff. On 18th and 19th June, COPE sponsored a joint workshop on women empowerment at the Hideaway Resort which was attended by women executives and youth members. This again was a great success. An action plan was also formulated during the two-day workshop. It has been agreed that similar programmes will be organized in the West and the North.

### **COPE WORKSHOPS FOR FTU AND FTA**

The Council of Pacific Education organized a workshop at the Sky Lodge Hotel in Nadi on 28th & 29th May 2022. Some seven selected members from each Union were invited. It was conducted by resource personnel from the Australian Education Union and Bro. Anand Singh – Chief Coordinator, Asia Pacific. The subject was 'Trade Union Renewal'. COPE also funded a two-day workshop at the Fiji Hideaway Resort on 18th and 19th June for FTU and FTA executives and members. The workshop was a success in terms of attendance and discussion.



### **WOMEN'S WING CAPACITY BUILDING**

The National Women's Wing has been conducting workshops in various branches. It is pleasing to note that the women's wing now has been formed at all branch levels. It is also overwhelming to see our sisters participating in union activities and getting empowered. The Nadi Women's Wing in conjunction with the National Women's Wing organized a workshop on Saturday 30th July in Nadi for executives and women members. The attendance was encouraging.

### **BRANCH WORKSHOPS**

**NAVUA** - Navua branch organized a workshop on Thursday 21st July at the Serua Provincial Council building. GS presented on behalf of the Union. Members were provided with dinner and a light social.

**BA** - Ba also organized their branch workshop on Wednesday 10th August at St Teresa Primary School. GS presented on industrial relations, FTU-CTCL and members health/welfare. Members were provided with refreshments and dinner.

**NASINU** - Nasinu organized their branch workshop on Wednesday 24th August at Rishikul Primary School. GS presented on industrial relations, FTU-CTCL and members health/welfare. Members were provided with refreshments and dinner.

**SUVA** - Suva had their branch workshop on Wednesday 31st August at the FTU Hall. GS addressed the house on industrial relations, FTU-CTCL and members health/welfare. Members were also provided with refreshments and dinner.

**REWA** - Rewa organized their branch workshop on Thursday 1st September at Vunimono High School. GS addressed the house on industrial relations, FTU-CTCL and members health/welfare. Rewa also honoured its players and supporters with a Certificate of Appreciation and a social.

**SAVUSAVU** - The Executives of Savusavu branch organized their branch workshop on Friday 2nd September at Blue Bay Restaurant. GS addressed the house on industrial relations, FTU-CTCL and members health/welfare. It was pleasing to note that members as far as Navatu and Vunusalusalu attended the workshop and social.

**LAUTOKA** - The Executives of Lautoka branch organized a workshop on Wednesday 14th September at Drasa Avenue School from 4.30pm. GS was at the venue to address members on industrial relations issues and their health and FTU-CTCL benefits.

The Union urges all other branches to conduct their branch workshops this term.

### **ZONAL SPORTS MEET**

The Western Zonal Meet took place at Balata College, Tavua on 27th August. The Western Branch Executives had their meeting on Saturday 13th August and discussions took place regarding the zonal meet. The Southern Zone will take place on Saturday 29th October in Navua, while the Northern Sports Meet took place on 24th September at Ganilau Park. We urge all branches to take part in football, netball, and men's and women's volleyball. HQ is grateful to Savusavu branch for taking the initiative to host the Northern zonal sports meet.

### **FIJI TRADES UNION CONGRESS**

The FTUC Biennial Conference was held at Tanoa Hotel Nadi on Saturday 14th May 2022. The house deliberated on numerous concerns regarding the blatant breach of workers' rights and the noncompliance with international instruments Fiji is signatory to. While the Employers Federation and FTUC often meet to move forward with the furtherance of Tripartism Government has not been coming to table. The Committee of Experts at the last International Labour Conference has cited Fiji for the breaches and further urged the Government to address all pending matters including the Labour Law Review agreement signed in 2015. Bro. Felix Anthony deliberated at length on draconian laws that are a constant threat to Union leaders. The ILO contact mission is waiting for confirmation of date by Government to meet with the social partners and examine the status of workers in the country. GS, Fahim Sheik and Sima Kumar were elected as FTUC National Treasurer, FTUC Youth Wing Secretary and FTUC Women's Wing Secretary, respectively. The Executives of FTUC met on Saturday 10th September during the FTUC National Council Meeting.

### **STAFF MATTERS**

FTU staff Arbind Kumar, the MABS and Filing Clerk, retired on 19/04/22. FTU thanks Mr. Arbind Kumar for his 20 years of service and wishes him all the best for his future endeavours.

### BRANCH VISITS/ CLUSTER MEETINGS

The General Secretary, on his tour visited schools and districts, and addressed cluster meetings to enlighten members on current issues, as well as, maintain connectivity. School Reps and Branch Executives worked hand-in-hand to ensure that these cluster meetings were a success in terms of attendance of members. It is important to reach out to membership at grass-root level to disseminate Union literature. The turnout in the Dreketi cluster was pleasing as members took the opportunity to listen directly from GS.

### INFORMATION/ NEWS UPDATES

The FTU website and facebook page have all the updated information on union services including MABS and In-house Medical Insurance. All media releases and other industrial relations issues are also uploaded. We encourage members to read the information posted and to share the news and links with other colleagues.

### MEMBERS HEALTH

The Union advises all members to look after their health, the type of food consumed and members must ensure that they have some time in the day to do some physical activities. NCDs are on the rise and members must take precautionary measures. It is a pity that Fiji is losing younger Fijians to NCDs.

### TEACHER EXODUS

Teachers are resigning in numbers and migrating to our neighboring countries. The erosion in terms and conditions of work over the past decade, the sense of insecurity, the unfair treatment, and imposition of illconceived policies are some key reasons sighted by those leaving. Unfortunately, the powers that be, are turning a blind eye to this. The ultimate losers are our children.

### UNIONS VISION OF TEACHERS AND EDUCATION

FTU believes that issues concerning teachers and education, in general, must be addressed without delay to prevent the further deterioration to the quality of education the Union desires to achieve to prepare our future citizens. The Union believes:

1. An education commission must be constituted;
2. Contracts must be replaced by tenure;
3. OMRS must be reviewed;
4. Anomalies from the 2017 JEE must be rectified and addressed;
5. Annual assessment and reward system should be reviewed to suit the teaching fraternity;
6. Teachers should be paid their four years of MyAPA annual increment;

7. Leave policy to be reviewed;
8. Teacher recruitment policy must be reviewed;
9. ECE teachers must be put on an annual salary and not hourly pay;
10. Executive teacher positions to be restored;
11. Counselor positions to be reviewed based on the need;
12. Boarding, transfer and location allowances must be reviewed;
13. Acting allowance should be paid as per the provision in the General Orders;
14. Disciplinary guidelines should be reviewed;
15. There should be regular consultations with all stakeholders;
16. Teachers and their reps (Unions) must be engaged in dialogue as per SDG 4 provisions;
17. A teacher protection policy must be formulated to protect the interests, rights and welfare of teachers; and
18. Adequate funding must be provided for inservice training.

### CONCLUSION

"Hard times may have held you down, but they will not last forever. Failure will never overtake you if the determination to succeed is strong enough. Sometimes adversity is what you need to face in order to become successful. Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning." (Albert Einstein)

Our apt message to members is that obstacles don't have to stop us. If we run into a wall, we should not turn around and give up, but figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it.

The commitment of FTU leadership to stand up and defend the collective and individual rights of the membership remains steadfast, and has been praised by many.

FTU has stood firm to defend its members when dirt was thrown at them. The various press releases and media statements are indicating that FTU is very much alive and well.

We have lost a lot, but it is important to remain united and regroup for better days ahead.

We will not rest till justice is accorded and the dignity of the profession is restored.





A ray of colours...FTU National Executives with participants of the Western Divisional Workshop at Blue Light Hotel, Nadi



Women in Union building...Executives of the National Women's Wing with women members who attended the Western Divisional Workshop at Blue Light Hotel



Empowerment and solidarity...FTU National Executives with participants of the Western Divisional Workshop at Tanoa Hotel, Rakiraki



Women leaders on the move...National Executives and Executives of the National Women's Wing with women members attending the Western Workshop at Tanoa Hotel, Rakiraki.





Vibrant women unionists...National Executives and Executives of the National Women's Wing with participants in Labasa



Active listeners...Executives of Taveuni Branch in Labasa during the Northern Divisional Workshop



The smiles speak the thoughts...Excited participants during the Northern Divisional Workshop in Labasa



GS with members of Nasinu Branch at Rishikul Primary School





The National President and General Secretary with the Rakiraki football side at Balata College



Once a footballer, always a footballer...NP showing his skills at Balata College during the official opening of the Western Zonal Sports Meet



Unity at its ever best....participants at Balata College during the Western Zonal Sports Meet



The Tavua football side in a full stride before the opening match at Balata College



Sporting activities bring out the best from members...the Tavua and Ba netball teams at Balata College during the Western Zonal Sports Meet



The ladies from the Sugar City made an impressive start at Balata College