

Newsletter

2021 - Vol. 3

Members, Bula Vinaka, Namaste & Asalaam walaikum. Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous 2022!

Dealing with Covid-19

This lockdown (and Covid) gave us an opportunity to reflect on much of what we do - work-wise and life-wise. We have had some 'space' to think - creatively about the world around us. Our world of work and our world of life - and about an important IR concept of "work-life balance".



© 2021 SOPA Images MUMBAI, MAHARASHTRA, INDIA - 11/3/2021: Photo by Ashish Vaishnav / a masked man walks past a graffiti of masked Mona Lisa.

The effects of this relentless pandemic have been multifold and have touched through the entire fabric of our society.

We understand that times have been hard on you and your families:

- ✓ Lockdowns, unplanned spending on groceries, sanitation, healthcare, childcare, and elderly-care added up to major financial burdens.
- ✓ Stress of keeping our families **safe** from the exposure to the **deadly** Covid-19 Virus as well as 'working from home' have resulted in **real mental health issues** for many workers. There has also been fear, grief and lonely tears as Covid-19 **deaths** have come closer to home.

Keeping the reality of C19 threats in mind, we wrote to member organizations reminding them that our members are frontline workers.

Extract of letters:

Dear CEO,

'Today I am reaching out for your assurances that you are taking utmost care towards the safety of our members, at your workplaces- (Fiji-wide). Today, what's at stake is beyond our usual 'bread and butter' haggles.

Today, we are talking 'life and death'. We seriously need assurances because the safety of our members - is paramount to our Union. The risk of exposure to this dangerous and deadly virus is too real and too close. We have had C19 incidents in some commercial banks.

Please convince us that you are - going the extra mile, being innovative and proactive about the safety for 'all of you' - than just doing the 'regulations' bit. Please also let us know your views on vaccinations.'

Positive responses were received from employers with assurances that their C19 health & safety measures and protocols were securely in place. Very few workplaces had C19 incidents. Those which did 'mitigated' the situations efficiently. Our eyes and ears were on the ground. We followed Covid-19 closely.

Covid Confusions

If you feel:

- *short-changed in your annual leave; sick leave; impatient leave; etc.; then yours is not the only Bank which has. In the prevailing C19 period, Banks got mixed-up about 'leaves' and other 'entitlements' and how and when these entitlements are used and enjoyed.*

*One Bank mistook the event of C19 Lockdown as a period of 'forced' annual leave. Another Bank mistook 14 days mandatory isolation as 'in-patient leave' & sick leave. And that too right bang in the middle of a **deadly** pandemic. But the point is, each time, each bank, had to retract their actions because the provisions of our CA are clear on how each entitlement is earned and utilized.*

- *adversely affected with any of your 'leaves' and /or any other entitlements – please get in touch with us asap – and we'll have this matter sorted-out quickly for you.*

Remembrances

This year we sadly lost some great souls, our members, colleagues, friends and loved ones. We remember them fondly with words:

"What is lovely never dies, but passes into another loveliness..." Thomas Bailey Aldrich



Condolences to the families of our late members:

- ✓ Ronald Shankar (RBF),
- ✓ Avinesh Prasad (QBE),
- ✓ Alisi Duwai (RBF)
- ✓ Sanjay Kumar (BOB)
- ✓ Usaia Ravono (Westpac)

Our sincere condolences to members who have lost their dear and loved ones

- ◆ Usa Kalim (Westpac)
- ◆ Anare Veilawa (WBC)
- ◆ Salote Sinu (BSP Life)
- ◆ Aseela Volavola (RBF)
- ◆ Sunia Tawake (ANZ Pac Ops)
- ◆ Sirilo Sautaka (HA)
- ◆ Barbara Fei Weli (BSP)
- ◆ Sujata Sharan (FDB)
- ◆ Ananelle Allen (ANZ)



[WFH aka; Telecommuting, Remote Working]

It has been a long time since mid-April Lockdown. Over the last six months our world of work has seen many challenges and changes. Some of these changes like 'working from home' (WFH), in some form or other, are likely to become the new norm.

C19 has forced the early fruition of the supposedly wishy-washy idea of 'working from home' right to the forefront. A significant percentage of our members have excelled in working from home. This has been complemented by faster internet connectivity, wireless & bluetooth technology and applications like Microsoft's meet and zoom. We asked some of you about your take on WFH. We talked to your bosses too. Here's our summary.

Some positive WFH feedback include;

- ◆ No loss in work productivity; even increased productivity;
- ◆ Flexibility of work hours; utilizing peak energy times;
- ◆ Increased creativity and quality work;
- ◆ Healthier work-life balance;

Some negative feedback include;

- ◆ Connectivity Issues / frustrations
- ◆ Uncomfortable workstations due to lack of space – especially if the spouse and children are also working from home;
- ◆ Working longer hours;
- ◆ Easily distracted;
- ◆ Personality not suited to working from home.

Generally, more members preferred working from work. However, WFH is an option that may be further explored and refined for those who thrive on the flexibility, independence and creativity it offers. **Let us know your thoughts on this!**



Home Is Where Work Is!

FB&FSEU Team persevered despite Covid-19 disruptions, through WFH and facing new IR challenges [almost on a daily basis]. It was a challenge but we made sure our membership services were not affected. We set up good communications through chat groups on viber with all our liaison officers Fiji-wide. We also managed to hold two of our EX-CO meetings via zoom whilst working from home.

As from the 1st of September, our Secretariat has re-opened. All C19 health & safety are in place – as per the requirements of the MCTTT; Fiji-care app; temperature checks; sanitizers; and only fully jabbed visitors allowed on premises.

Industrial Relations Up-date Collective Agreements

ANZ & ANZ [PACOP]

- ✓ CA's have been rolled over and are now due for review in April, 2022.

Westpac

- ✓ CA is due for renewal in January, 2022. All Salary review will be for the year 2023 onwards.

RBF

- ✓ CA to be reviewed in March 2022.

BSP

- ✓ Both parties will be meeting soon to discuss.

Bred Bank

- ✓ We have progressed substantially, ironed out a few contentious issues and we are confidentially looking at January 2022 for signing our new CA.

FNPF

- ✓ No CA as yet but I hope to commence discussions soon.

FDB

- ✓ I had a very productive meeting with the FDB CEO, Mr. Saud Minam and Manager, HR Mr. Semisi Buimaiwai. Negotiations are continuing.

Log Of Claims

Housing Authority

- ✓ HA Authority has lodged its log of claim with our Union this year. Due to adverse effects due to Covid 19, HA asked our Union for a waiver of certain entitlements like 'sick leave bonuses'; over-time rates; postponement of long-service leave payments; and stay on COLA and salary increments; up until June next year.

Our Union in good-faith has agreed to concede to many of HA's requests on understandings that: **1)** none of the entitlements are forfeited but would be made good once the situation improves; and **2)** there would be no **retrenchment** in their workforce and none of our members would be made **redundant**.

New India Insurance, LIC, Q.I, and Bank of Baroda and Fiji Police Credit Union.

- ✓ We have lodged our Log of Claims (inclusive of COLA) with the above employers and are awaiting response from these Employers to initiate negotiations.

Fiji Sugar Growers Fund

- ✓ NS met with the CEO on 7th of December. It has been agreed in principle that staff salaries would be COLA adjusted for 2019, 2020 & 2021. Only the applicable percentages need to be agreed upon.

BSP Life, FTU Credit Union, PRB,

- ✓ We are yet to lodge our Claims with the above employers.

Retirement

- ✓ *Negotiated settlement in the retirement dispute in ERT involving five of our Housing Authority members. HA will revert to the provisions of our Collective Agreement.*
- ✓ *We have also negotiated settlement with HA on disputes involving our members! Sisilia Rakesa and Akuila Saukuru.*

Representations

Our Union has never shied away from representing any member in distress. Former Union members, **Sarjeet Singh** (BOB, Sigatoka) and **Mitesh Sharma** (BOB, Ba), **William Magnus** (ANZ, Suva), **Charlie Otto** (SCGF, Savusavu), **Manoj Kumar & Anare Ratumaiwai** (HA, Suva) and **Roshni Pal** (FNPF, Suva) continue to be represented, by our Union, despite the end of their tenures.

FB&FSEU is your (employment insurance policy) for protection against 'unfair work practices'.

No Jab-No Job

Whilst our Union strictly abides by the Law, we also have obligations, towards those within our membership, who have been adversely affected by this Law. Four of our (long-term) members, who have recently lost their jobs due to this Law, have approached our Union for some assistance/intervention.

We wrote to the respective Employers requesting them to consider 'early-retirement' for these workers, since all of them would have been eligible for retirement (and retirement benefits) within the next three years. All employers refused, citing the Law.

The Employers are well within their rights to refuse our requests. We are not interested in the merits of the vaccine debate. Our interests are purely employment relations. And here, we strongly feel the Employers have failed to demonstrate due compassion (and good-faith) towards their loyal and long serving staff, who have lost their livelihoods.

IR Issues of Interests

The issues surrounding '*part-timing*' and '*individual employment contracts*' need to be seriously looked at by our Union – and how they are impacting upon some hard-fought benefits and entitlements in our Collective Agreements. Are employers side-stepping Union/Employer obligations by contracting part-timers on individual employment contracts?

Branch Visits

I have been privileged to have met many of our Labasa members in March this year. Special thanks to **Rajneel Maharaj, Neel Sebastian Chand, Atinesh Deo, Mohammed Saiyum, Viliame Tamanikaitani & Jagdish Gounder** for making my pre-meeting, meeting and post-meeting merge into a momentous memorable event. Vinaka vakalevu!

I have appreciated meeting members at:

- **Bank of Baroda, Suva** branch on the 22nd of October, 2021 (8:15 -8:30 a.m.) Thanks to **Ashneel Sager** for organizing this meeting.
- LICI members on the 10th of November, 2021 (1 p.m. – 1:20 p.m.) Thanks to **Rakesh Chand** for organizing this meeting.
- **Lautoka Liaison officers** on 6th of December, 2021, at the Northern Club for lunch. Nice venue, excellent food. Thank you all for your engaging company.
- **Sugar Cane Growers Fund** members on 7th of December, 2021. Thanks to **Nilesh Karan** for organizing this meeting and for facilitating tele-conferencing with members from Labasa, Seqaqa and Sigatoka. A very fruitful first meeting!
- Special thanks to **Jone Namata** (ANZ, Lautoka) for organizing an after-work, (prolonged) kava session... and as a result of which... my sincere apologies to **Nadi Liaison officers**, whom I could not meet, at the scheduled time, in Nadi – Sorry and I owe you one.

I am looking forward to visiting more branches throughout 2022, starting from SUVA, Westwards.

Our Sub-Committees

Sub-committees have been working hard on important tasks assigned / delegated to them. The National Secretary is a vital member of each of these committees, guiding, contributing and steering the committee towards its goals/objectives.

Natural Disaster & Relief Committee

- ✓ There has been no policy in the past as to: 'how to assess and what amount to pay' in times of natural disasters like 'Yasa' & 'Anna'. The Union took an **ad-hoc** approach to disaster relief in the past.
- ✓ Executive Council has endorsed this sub-committee's policies which can now be applied **quickly, reliably and uniformly**, to assist our members in times of natural disasters.

Investment Committee

- ✓ Executive Council has endorsed the policy of the Investment committee.
- ✓ How will you as a member benefit from the Union's investments (2019 AGM resolution) ??--- the exiting news will be unveiled soon. Keep in touch

Constitutional Review Committee [CRC]

- ✓ FB&FSEU Constitution was last reviewed in 1996.
- ✓ The CRC was burdened with the tedious task of reviewing, clause by clause, rule by rule, the whole Constitution of our Union.
- ✓ The aim of the CRC is to bring about more **transparency** and **accountability** in the Secretariat and **good governance** in the Executive of our Union.
- ✓ Recommendations of the CRC will be endorsed by the Executive Council before the proposed amendments are to be voted on by all of you, at the next AGM.

AGM committee

- ✓ From venue to menu – they will plan and execute. We are excited to know of their plans but can't reveal much at this stage.

Website

- ✓ Our website is to be presented to the EX-Co on the 17th of December and their suggestions and input will be incorporated. We aim to launch our website prior to our next AGM. We are excited to go digital. Keen for a 'sneak-view' - just Request!

Our Secretariat has re-located to:

- ✓ **14-18 McGregor Road** (opposite the Fiji Police Credit Union)
- ✓ bigger, better and much airier offices
- ✓ literally a few blocks, up the road, from our previous locality.
- ✓ telephones and emails remain the same

Our new place was blessed by Pastor Moses O'Connor (a former Banker/member, on the right with Matia Tuisawau (RBF)



- ✓ has a big hall
- ✓ has 10 car parking spaces
- ✓ has a nice compound and frontage overlooking MacGregor Road



Plans for our new place

- ✓ Host Executive Council Meetings
- ✓ Host our own Trainings Programs
- ✓ Let out the hall to other businesses as training center and for small-scale functions and performing artists
- ✓ Feature as a **permanent art gallery** for many local artists wanting to exhibit & sell their art to visitors to our premises.
- ✓ Rent out car parking space (firstly to our members) at \$60-00 per month [which equates to \$2 per/day]. **Express your interests now!**
- ✓ Banker's Flea-Market for 'funfair' and festivity with flea market stalls, music, kava and food. Sell from a hired table or from your car boot.
- ✓ After School Home-Work Center – [safe & supervised] only for the children of our members.
- ✓ A small-scale plant nursery.

Dates to be announced

*'Kava Bar' – Operational
Thursday & Friday evenings –
All members are welcome! This is a
project of the Credit Union*



Union's Building (62 Gordon Street)

- ✓ Lease renewal due – 1 January 2022, Negotiations are now underway.

Medical Insurance

- ✓ New policy term – 4 March 2022
- ✓ Clear your arrears if you wish to continue

The Arrears committee have decided to stop paying on your behalf if you are habitual defaulters. It is time-consuming chasing after you. Both the Insurer and the Insured are secured. Only our Union is exposed to the risks of non-repayments.

Up-Coming Events (we'll keep you posted)

- 17th December 2021:
Executive Council Meeting
- January / February 2022
Constitution Amendment Awareness & Liaison Officers Training Programs (Fiji-wide)
- March 2022:
Executive Council Elections
- April 2022:
Tentative AGM

This Newsletter is slightly longer because it is in-house composed, presented, digitally transmitted, paperless inkless and COP26 compliant. We hope you enjoyed it! Let us know your thoughts on what you like or dislike for our future improvements.

Connect with your National Secretary via anitsingh@connect.com.fj; 9921012/9169073



[Christmas pudding | Jamie Oliver Christmas recipes](#) : This Christmas try this amazing Christmas pudding from my favourite British chef.

[José Feliciano - Feliz Navidad \(Official Audio\) - YouTube](#) : And of course, the all-time Christmas favourite song – for decades!

MOCE !