



**Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2024**

## **Press Release: FTUC Reiterates Position On National Budget in response to Labor Party's Statement**

I respond to the unsigned Fiji Labour Party's statement questioning my position in relation to the budget. I am in no wrong company including the Labour Party. I stand for what I and the Executives of FTUC think is best for workers. We do not beat our drums unnecessarily unless there is something to achieve for workers. Not even for political gain.

The writer for the Labour Party appears to be ignorant and really boggled in the mind to not be aware of the achievements of FTUC over the years and seems to be unhappy that the FTUC is not moaning over matters that, as we see, are work in progress. The FTUC is content for now with the minimum wage issue with a clear understanding with the Government that the \$6 minimum wage is achievable over a short period of time unlike the previous Government who took 9 years to implement the \$4 minimum wage demand by workers. We did not hear a whimper from the Labour Party as to why the Minimum Wage was not revised then. The Tripartite partners are now going to embark on the review of the Industry Wages Councils which will also see increases in minimum rates of pay for different industries and job classifications. We certainly do not wish to disturb that process.

On the public sector, negotiations and consultations are continuing with a meeting planned for even today (Tuesday 2/7). We are very interested in these talks and will continue to liaise with our affiliates. Surprisingly, the writer forgot to mention the 10% to 20% increases for other civil servants. The Public Sector Unions are capable of negotiating and pursuing their claims and no one can undermine their rights unlike the past Government.

As a Trade Union, we are happy that anyone gets a pay increase, Over the last 18 years, salary increases for Chief Executive Officers in Government and statutory bodies, PM and other MPs increased many folds. That didn't seem painful at all. What we see now is that it is politically correct to condemn pay rises for MPs. We in the Trade Unions see that as a justification for all to get a pay rise and the FTUC has called for that. We are seeing results. We did not get as much as we asked for, but we see this as work in progress and we hope to achieve a Living Wage which Fiji has never had.

The claim that the Finance Minister has undermined the "crux of trade unionism" is nonsense. It is after 18 years that trade unions are free to collectively bargain and even go on strike. To jog your memory, the latest Fiji Water strike which I led and achieved a 21% pay increase and other benefits. There are many collective agreements being negotiated and signed including wage adjustments. Unions today are being acknowledged and heard, and you have also witnessed unions participating in rallies. The FTUC welcomes this Government's commitment to democracy and observance of workers' rights. All these were taboo just a year and a half ago. You must also remember that FTUC was involved in the reinstatement of ATS and Fiji Airways workers. That's hundreds of families. Indeed very short memories. The picture attached to the FLP statement, is of the time when negotiations between the Unions and Government resulted in the decision to reinstate workers in ATS, which the FLP has attempted to misrepresent.

The statement makes no mention of the 9.2-million-dollar settlement for mine workers. No previous Government had the gumption to address this issue, including the Labour Government. It need not to take weeks or months to address this. This Government addressed this matter in a single hour of talks. The Finance Minister (DPM) and this Government must be given credit for understanding the plight of these workers and the need to bring closure to this long-standing issue. The Director of ILO for Pacific Island Countries had this to say in congratulating FTUC and I quote *"This success is a true testament of power of unions and your steadfast leadership. We hope that this achievement will send a reminder to workers that joining unions is the best way of fighting for collective rights"* unquote. Similarly, these talks also resolved the 461 Employment tribunal cases regarding terminated WAF workers

for which I was imprisoned twice and charged in 2019 and appeared in court numerous times over 4 years. Again, a win for workers and justice. Compensation payments will be made to these workers.

Above all, the Labour Party is ignorant of the fact that considerable progress has been made in the Labour Law Review that has been completed and will fully restore rights of workers in compliance with the International Labour Organization (ILO) Core Conventions and other conventions that Fiji has ratified. The review has addressed all recommendations of the Committee of Experts of the Committee on Application of Standards of the ILO. The review has been comprehensive and encompassing all matters of concern to workers in Fiji. We are working closely with FCEF and Government to ensure that this review becomes law in the near future. This is most important for workers and the most any trade union movement can do.

The FTUC is in no mood to play politics to please the critics of Government. We are interested in getting results and we need to ensure that there is a strategy and a plan to make it happen.

The FTUC calls upon all to not misuse the newly found freedoms just to be destructive and malign people for political gain. Let us use democracy to uplift our people. In that spirit we refrain from judging the Labour Party or its leader as to where they were and where they are today.

**Felix Anthony**  
**National Secretary**  
**FTUC**

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