

ALWU NEWSLETTER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE AOTEAROA LEGAL WORKERS' UNION

PROGRESS REPORT

What has ALWU been doing since the last newsletter?

SALARY SURVEY

Research into salaries and collective action shows that not talking about money only benefits the employer. ALWU is encouraging its members to complete the 2020 ALWU salary survey as part of its minimum wage campaign and pursuit of salary transparency. The results (to be released in the coming weeks) will include data on:

- typical salaries by position and PQE;
- salary increases between 2019 and 2020; and
- bonuses.

This data will be a valuable resource for ALWU's members, as a bargaining tool, and by helping legal works to know where they sit, whether they are being paid fairly, and whether their employer's claims about their pay are true.

CHRISTCHURCH DEVELOPMENTS

The expansion of solidarity into Te Waka a Māui has made great strides this month. ALWU executive members, Diana Youssif and Natalie Weyer, have run information sessions at Anderson Lloyd, Lane Neave and Anthony Harper. ALWU is also in the process of having meetings with different employers based down south to build relationships, discuss minimum wage obligations, and work with employers to establish and ensure accurate time records.

ALWU is also looking to establish an organising committee in Christchurch to help with continuing to grow its presence - see ALWU's call for expressions of interest below.

NEED SUPPORT?

As ALWU grows in size, a range of workers at legal workplaces continue to get in touch with individual employment issues. ALWU is committed to helping workers at an individual level as well as through collective action. ALWU can provide confidential support and, if needed, it can connect members to workplace delegates and/or senior lawyers who can offer expert employment advice, support and advocacy. Get in touch at contact@alwu.org.nz.

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

ALWU is looking for members to form its Christchurch branch organising committee. if you are based in Christchurch and are keen to be involved with what ALWU does, please email contact@alwu.org.nz!

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PROGRESS REPORT CONT'D

ALWU MEETS WITH NEW ZEALAND'S BIGGEST LAW FIRMS TO DISCUSS MINIMUM WAGE COMPLIANCE

As part of its ongoing minimum wage campaign, ALWU, surveyed its members last year and found that a significant number of junior lawyers have at times in their career been paid less than the minimum wage. A graduate earning \$48,000 only has to work over 49 hours a week to have been paid less than the minimum wage (so if you worked a weekend while a graduate – here's looking at you).

ALWU shared its findings on minimum wage breaches with New Zealand law firms and, in the hope of prompting change, developed and shared a best practice Minimum Wage Policy. It then met with New Zealand's fifteen largest law firms to discuss how each firm is monitoring hours worked and its current minimum wage / overtime practices. The answer was consistent across the board: monitoring and overtime practices are discretionary – that is, it is completely up to a junior's manager.

ALWU has continued to ask firms the same question: what are you doing to make sure your staff are being paid minimum wage? Some responses included: "I worked those hours in my day", "sometimes people stay until 10pm because they went for a two hour long run at lunchtime – we don't want to lose flexibility", and "if juniors don't want to be stressed they should have worked in the public sector". Firms want ALWU to understand that they are a "business" and that salaries are set at "market value" (which looks suspiciously like the large firms deciding en masse what they will pay their junior staff). It is a battle to change standards and expectations in a profession so deeply rooted in hierarchy. There is also a pervasive thought that junior lawyers are "lucky" to work in big law firms. ALWU exists to challenge employers on these views and be a voice to its members.

But there has been some progress. Some firms are now running education sessions on time recording; others are monitoring hours worked by juniors; and some have paid their juniors minimum wage top ups. This is the first time in the profession's history that juniors' hours are being actively monitored and top ups are being paid.

Despite the issues mentioned above, all employers ALWU has met with care about their staff and making their firm as successful as it can be. Law firms are profit driven, but that does not have to preclude valuing their people. A lot of the discussions that have occurred between ALWU and law firms have involved common ground and shared interests. The major difference is that while firms discuss their keenness for "good culture", "work life balance", and "diversity and inclusion", ALWU wants to see hard evidence, written policies, and implementation to ensure minimum wage compliance.

HOSPO WORKERS UNION

It has been heartening to see several fledgling unions spring up recently, and ALWU often engages with other smaller "precariat" unions who are still finding their feet as we have a lot to learn from each other. In February, ALWU met with the newly formed Hospitality Workers' Union, who is facing similar minimum entitlement issues. ALWU is excited to see the growth of solidarity in Aotearoa and to be able to support other new unions.



DIVERSITY POLICY

ALWU is conscious of its executive's lack of diversity and is prioritising change as it looks forward to this year's elections. To progress this, ALWU has drafted a diversity policy that will be shared with representative groups before being shared with ALWU's members for feedback and consultation. This policy is aimed at increasing the diversity of the executive through engagement, quotas, and targets, but ALWU is also examining the diversity of its membership and how it may run more targeted campaigns to address diversity issues.

THE BIG PICTURE: BROADER ENGAGEMENT

What else is on ALWU's mind this month? Worksafe and the Law Society!

MEETING WITH WORKSAFE

ALWU met with Worksafe and several large law firms in February to discuss psychosocial harm and progress since the Bazley report. As ALWU's relationship with Worksafe develops, ALWU looks forward to an ongoing seat at the table for these important discussions.

THE NEW ZEALAND LAW SOCIETY: WHERE IS THE ACCOUNTABILITY?

Stuff published an article in February that centred around the legal profession's #metoo movement. An individual who is alleged to be at the centre of the Russell McVeagh sexual harassment and bullying allegations attended the Law Society's anniversary dinner. ALWU understands that this individual is also the subject of several Law Society complaints and is still a practising lawyer.

ALWU understands through Stuff's article that the Law Society has issued him with an annual practicing certificate, which includes a "fit and proper person" requirement, three times since they became aware of the complaints. He continues to practice and continues to have the ability to hire junior staff. And, as this article shows, he continues to be welcome at Law Society events.

Where is the accountability? ALWU is excited to see reform and change in the Law Society's processes, but it understands from its members that the process is both secretive and slow. The Law Society also has the power to suspend a lawyer from practice during an investigation, which ALWU considers that should happen to a person credibly accused with serious accusations. ALWU looks forward to continuing to advocate for change in this space, and to work with key stakeholders to achieve essential reform. If you are interested in working with ALWU in its engagement with the Law Society, please contact ALWU at contact@alwu.org.nz.



CORONAVIRUS

ALWU has heard reports of workers facing issues due to workplace policies or actions regarding Coronavirus. ALWU is available to support workers who are required to work from home, and can help you liaise with your employer about pay. Get in touch at contact@alwu.org.nz.

MEME CORNER

Some comic solidarity to provide relief from the strain of collective action. Submit to us at contact@alwu.org.nz.



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