

ALWU NEWSLETTER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE AOTEAROA LEGAL WORKERS' UNION

PROGRESS REPORT

What has ALWU been doing since the last newsletter?

COVID-19



Like everyone else in the legal profession, ALWU's focus is currently on Covid-19 and how it can best support its members through the shutdown period.

This time is difficult for all involved. For legal employers, the future is uncertain. They do not know what the months ahead look like or how clients and profits will be affected. Different practices will suffer or thrive during this time - Covid-19 will not affect us all equally.

For employees, that uncertainty can be scary. It is OK to feel like you have less bargaining power, or to question whether you should speak out about issues in your workplace at a time when you are being told that you should simply feel grateful for having a job. However, at a time like this collective action has never been more important. Together, employees can look after each other, hold employers accountable and empower each other to exercise their rights.

ALWU intends to support and assist its members as much as possible during this time. It has started a number of initiatives over the last month to help it to do so.

PRO BONO PANEL

To ensure ALWU members can access specialist employment law advice regardless of their financial position, ALWU has created a Pro Bono Panel.

The Panel is a group of highly experienced lawyers (including two QCs) who are qualified to practice on their own account and have volunteered to provide free legal advice and representation to members who require assistance with legal issues.



Join our group on facebook - Aotearoa Legal Workers' community.

ALWU created a page for its members to share experiences, questions, and concerns if comfortable - so we can all feel connected during these strange and uncertain times.

EMPLOYMENT LAW COMMITTEE

ALWU's Employment Law Committee is chaired by employment law expert Maria Dew QC and consists of eight highly experienced barristers, senior law firm employees, and in-house practitioners as well as a law clerk at the Employment Court.

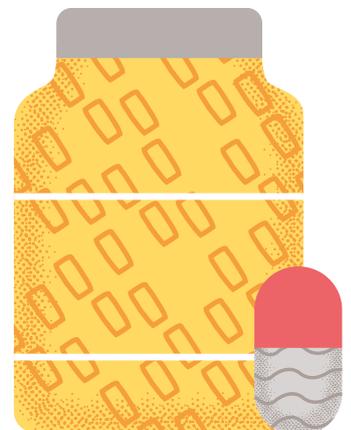
The Employment Law Committee's role is to produce general employment law guidance for ALWU members on a range of issues - with a current focus on Covid-19.

As the shutdown unfolded, ALWU was approached by members at legal workplaces across the country who were being asked to accept reductions to their salaries. Helpfully, ALWU's Employment Law Committee put together a [Guidance Paper on wage subsidy and potential salary reductions](#). This Guidance Paper has been circulated to ALWU's members and more broadly on social media.

NEED SUPPORT?

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 senior lawyers who can provide expert employment advice.



ALWU ▼

AOTEAROA LEGAL WORKERS' UNION

WHAT ARE THE LAW FIRMS DOING?

Let's start with the good stuff... Chapman Tripp gave employees \$300 for lockdown costs. Duncan Cotterill and Dentons Kensington Swan members have reported that their firms have provided excellent support during this time and proved very flexible with hours worked and budget expectations. At Buddle Findlay, HR has provided regular communications updating staff, answering FAQs, and giving details on how to access support.

The following large and medium-seized law firms received the government's wage subsidy - Simpson Grierson (\$2,335,108.80); MinterEllisonRuddWatts (\$2,069,265.60); Bell Gully (\$1,810,718.40); Meredith Connell (\$1,639,178.40); Duncan Cotterill (\$1,488,727.20); Lane Neave (\$1,116,158.40); Anthony Harper (\$896,870.40); Wynn Williams (\$731,078.40); and Greenwood Roche (\$407,716.80).

Simpson Grierson has returned its payout, which it applied for based on a forecast drop in revenue. The firm said it is now forecasting a smaller impact and repaid the subsidy on Monday this week (4 May 2020). MinterEllisonRuddWatts and Bell Gully have also indicated they will follow suit and pay back the wage subsidy they received.

Firms Chapman Tripp, Buddle Findlay, and Dentons Kensington Swan have not received the wage subsidy. DLA Piper also did not receive the wage subsidy but has reduced employees' salaries. ALWU understands this pay cut has not been met with a commensurate decrease in working hours or budget.

At Simpson Grierson, employees have been offered to work four days a week at 80% pay. That reduction to hours and salary is voluntary and has been offered to acknowledge different work demands for different practice areas. Similarly, at Buddle Findlay a 2020 Flexible Work and Lifestyle Leave package has been offered. This includes greater flexibility with start / finish times, options to "buy" leave, and decreased hours.

Many firms have also asked their employees to take annual leave. Additionally, employees that had booked leave prior to Covid-19 have been told they will not be able to cancel their leave. This has been the case even in situations where flights and trips have had to be cancelled.

ALWU BY THE NUMBERS

802 members

ALWU has 546 ordinary members, 200 student members and 56 associate members.
187 of ALWU's members are at the largest eight firms.

8 Auckland Branch members

The Auckland Branch consists of eight Auckland members. The Branch meet monthly and organise events, law firm presentations, and discuss the most pressing concerns for members in the Auckland region.

12 Executive members

ALWU's Executive meets weekly and is made up of members in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch. The Executive maintains relationships with key legal stakeholders. This includes New Zealand's largest legal employers, the Law Society, various student societies, and other Aotearoa unions.

28 delegates

ALWU has delegates at most New Zealand large law firms - including Bell Gully, Chapman Tripp, Simpson Grierson, Buddle Findlay, DLA Piper, Dentons Kensington Swan, Morrison Kent, Duncan Cotterill, and Meredith Connell.

Delegates are ALWU's lifeblood - they create change and movement within the legal workplace and keep ALWU's work relevant to the individual issues at the particular firm.

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

If you are interested in joining the Auckland Branch Council, Pro Bono Panel, or becoming a Delegate at your legal workplace please contact the ALWU Executive at contact@alwu.org.nz.



WHERE TO HEAR MORE

THE LAWYERING PODCAST

In the "Lawyering Podcast" Emma Fitzgerald interviewed Hayley Coles (ALWU Co-President). This podcast is aimed to inspire lawyers, celebrate the good things happening in the profession and drive positive change.

In this episode, Hayley discussed ALWU and its beginnings - how it was formed and its key objectives. ALWU was established for the most vulnerable members of the legal profession and Hayley outlined why a Union was more appropriate than a support group.

Hayley also discussed membership and how legal workers can get involved and the positive feedback received from members and the legal community as a whole. Listen today to hear more about ALWU and its beginnings.

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.



MEME CORNER

Some comic solidarity to provide relief from the strain of collective action. More this issue given the difficult times at present!



OTHER COMRADES

HOSPO WORKERS UNION

It has been heartening to see several fledgling unions spring up recently. ALWU often engages with other smaller "precarious" unions who are still finding their feet as we have a lot to learn from each other. Recently, ALWU met with the newly formed Hospitality Workers' Union, which 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.

As with the legal profession, collective action for hospitality workers has never been more important than during these uncertain times. In the spirit of unionisation, order some food from your local eatery now that we are in Alert Level 3!