

Working Life

THE PSA JOURNAL MARCH 2018



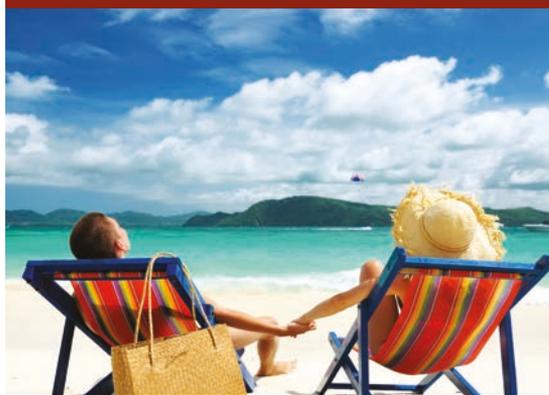
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On the cover

PSA member Clare Meyer enjoying Out In The Park in Wellington.

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TĒNĀ KOUTOU

WE'RE NOW SEVERAL months into our new Labour – New Zealand First – Green Party Government, and already there's been plenty of changes to be pleased with. Our feature article this issue (pages 8-11) takes a good look at the new government's plans for employment law, which reverse many of the anti-worker changes introduced by their predecessors.

Our work lobbying and demanding more change isn't over though, not by a long shot. While we have a Government that is perhaps more open to our ideas than previously, we still have to put in the mahi – meeting with ministers, writing submissions and campaigning publicly for the issues we care about.

We are particularly glad to see that the Government has reconvened the Joint Working Group, and will introduce the changes to the Equal Pay Act that will make it easier for women to get paid fairly for our work. We want to see the kind of victories that our fellow union members working in aged and disability care achieved last year. You can find out more about this on pages 20-21.

So many PSA members across the country took part in our Yes We Care campaign in the build up to the election, fighting for better mental services for the people who need them and the staff who provide them. PSA members are in both groups, of course, and we will be closely involved in the review (see pages 14-15) that the Government has committed to, working on making real improvements to this vital part of our health system.

In order to increase our influence politically, our union structure also needs to be strong internally. Part



of this is the PSA's commitment to bicultural unionism and the proper recognition of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We invited unionist and Māori political commentator Morgan Godfery to dig into what it means for our union movement to properly recognise Te Tiriti, and you can read his article on pages 12-13.

In April, another part of building a strong union structure will start, with Annual Members' Meetings (AMM) taking place across PSA worksites all over New Zealand. At these meetings, you'll get a chance to raise issues, hear about what's happening in other parts of our union, and to elect delegates who will represent you.

I urge you all to attend your AMM – talk with your delegate or organiser about when and where it's happening – and to consider putting yourself forward as a delegate. Being a delegate is not only an important role, it is also an amazing learning opportunity. You'll be given (free) training and support from PSA staff, and who knows where it could take you?

I'm so glad that I first stood as a delegate, many years ago – back then I never would have imagined that one day you would elect me to be the president of our union, or that my role would take me around New Zealand and across the world to meet other unionists and share our successes and the lessons learned from our failures.

As always, it is an honour for me to lead our union, and I hope you see yourself reflected in these pages. ☺

***He aha te mea nui o te ao?
He tangata, he tangata, he tangata.***

**Haere ora, Haere pai
Janet Quigley**





Remembering Helen

There's no question that the late union leader and activist Helen Kelly changed many lives. In a soon-to-be-released documentary, film-maker Tony Sutorius examined how Helen managed to touch so many people, and, in the process, his own life changed too.

TONY AND HELEN had made films together for the Council of Trade Unions (CTU, the umbrella body for unions including the PSA) and, like so many others found with Helen, their work relationship had led to a friendship.

When she stepped down as CTU president after being diagnosed with cancer, the two met for coffee and Tony suggested a project. "I said, I don't know what you're going to do now, you probably don't know either. But I have a feeling it would be a really good idea for me to tag along and film you doing it."

It was Helen's unusual voice that attracted Tony. He says she had a way of talking which made issues come alive, "it sounded like they were people, instead of policy screeds." He wanted to get to the bottom of that, and the result is this

film, with the working title *Helen Kelly's Mates*.

Tony explains where this comes from: "She didn't draw a line between her personal and professional life. People became her mates. It wasn't about an issue any more. She had mates, they were in trouble, they needed support and there she was. It felt very simple and very right, a very Kiwi way to operate."

The film is planned for cinema release later in 2018, and the mission will be to get it screened as widely as possible. Tony wants New Zealanders to see this not just because of Helen's remarkable work, but also because of the wider themes it raises.

"There's a lot of deep ideas that Helen brought alive about what being a New Zealander is. We really like the idea of egalitarianism and

that you should stick up for your mates. Helen showed that if you're able to step outside your own cultural and social networks and get out into the world and engage with people, it's still there. So if it's possible to harness it and awaken people about what that means, it becomes an incredible tool."

And in the process, Tony found his outlook on his life and work profoundly affected.

"It's made me really question how I used to make these intensely emotional films with people and then say, 'okay, that's done thanks'. After watching Helen, I couldn't justify it any more. I become their mates and now I have responsibilities to them. I still play an active role in the Pike River families' groups. I can no longer walk away." ☺

JOHN RAVLICH: 30 YEARS AND OUT

CONGRATULATIONS TO John Ravlich, who has retired as a PSA delegate after 30 years representing and leading his colleagues at the New Zealand Customs Service in Auckland.

To recognise his hard work over three decades, John was presented with one of the PSA's Delegate Achievement Awards.

The Delegate Achievement Award is second only in status to Life Membership of the PSA, and recognises "outstanding leadership above and beyond the expected duties."

Fewer than 15 have been handed out, and John is a worthy recipient.

The presentation was made in a ceremony at Auckland Customs House in February, with PSA vice-president Benedict Ferguson handing over the award, along with words of recognition from



John's manager Brendon Pearce on behalf of Customs.

Following the presentation, PSA members undertook the challenging task of finding a new delegate to replace John – though no 30-year

commitment was required of potential nominees.

To find out more about the award, visit

psa.org.nz/at-work/psa-at-work/delegate-awards/



COMPETITION & WINNERS



CONGRATULATIONS TO our book winner, Susanne Markwitz. Susanne wins a copy of Tom Scott's hilarious and heartbreaking memoir, *Drawn Out*.

Our summer colouring competition was a huge hit again this year. Thanks to everyone who took the time to enter! Our grand prize winner is Anna Eades, age 10, who sent in the most impressive entry.

Anna used decoupage to raise up some of the birds and added some excellent looking googly eyes.

Truly above and beyond the average colouring in entry!

Other winners are: Christine Molenaar, Isaac, Josh McMurray, and Amber.

WIN AN OUT@PSA T-SHIRT!

Send your name, phone number and shirt size to competition@psa.org.nz by May 4 to be in to win.



PSA STAFFER ELECTED TO WELLINGTON CITY COUNCIL

FLEUR FITZSIMONS, who is part of the PSA's legal team, was elected as a Wellington City Councillor just before Christmas. As one of two councillors for the Southern Ward, Fitzsimons replaces Paul Eagle who was elected to Parliament as the new MP for Rongotai (which includes the Southern Ward) three months earlier.

With an eventual majority of 332 votes, Fitzsimons beat seven other candidates for the seat, and was

sworn in early February. She has been given portfolio responsibility for the Living Wage, recreation, city safety (in particular addressing sexual violence), and community facilities.

As well as her work for the PSA for a number of years, Fitzsimons was a leader in 26 For Babies, the campaign for more paid parental leave, and previously she was a president of both local and national-level student unions.



Wellington City Councillor Fleur Fitzsimons and Mayor Justin Lester.

A NEW HOME FOR OUR DIGITAL ARCHIVE

DID YOU know we've had a journal since 1914? Did you know you can browse the complete archives of our 103-year history online? Well it's true!

Our online archive has had a makeover - We've moved from Out of

Print to psa.recollect.co.nz. A much more robust search, more reliable tools and a much more user-friendly interface are just some of the benefits of the new system.

We're hoping to add and improve to

the archive with time, but for now, enjoy a browse through our history.

Visit psa.recollect.co.nz and have a look through over a century of our history.

EVEN BRIEFIER

- WATCH the recorded live stream of our recent intervention and prevention of bullying seminar at psa.org.nz/febseminar
- NZ is number 1 of the least corrupt countries again, with public servants playing a huge part in this. Good job, everyone!
- THE PSA now has a specialised growth team, who will be supporting existing recruitment and organising. If you see someone from our growth team make sure to say hi!

CALLING ALL FORMER TYPING POOL WORKERS!

ARE YOU a former public service typing pool staffer – or do you know someone who is? The Keystrokes Per Minute project wants to talk to you!

Keystrokes Per Minute is recording the oral histories of people who worked in typing pools from 1945 to the present day. That includes typists, shorthand typists, secretaries and modern-era administrators. These are untold stories, covering the highly skilled work of the typing pool, the changes in technology and the status of their profession.

The project wants to span the decades – so if you've got a story to tell, get in touch. Check out the

website for more detail: keystrokes.storycollective.nz/



Feature

The background is a stylized illustration of a mountain range. The mountains are rendered in various shades of brown and tan, creating a sense of depth. In the foreground, a hiker with a large backpack is silhouetted against the landscape, standing on a rocky outcrop. The sky is a gradient of light blue and yellow, with numerous birds in flight, scattered across the upper half of the image. A large white diamond shape is centered in the middle of the image, containing the text.

Climbing
back to
fairness

By Asher Wilson-Goldman

The last nine years saw PSA members consistently speaking out publicly about unfair changes to how we negotiate better pay and conditions. Now, with a new government sworn in, what's changed?

FROM THE BAD...

"Bad employers will be empowered by this law while our most vulnerable workers will be hurt."

This quote, from PSA national secretary Erin Polaczuk, summed up the attitude of more than 8000 PSA members who submitted against the former National Government's changes to employment law in 2014.

PSA members were as vocal as we've ever been, with 50 presenting in person to MPs to tell them why the proposed laws would hurt working people. We made a powerful stand, but the former Government didn't listen.

Since then, we've seen bad employers use these laws to hurt unionised workers – our friends in the Meat Workers Union have perhaps been the hardest hit. They've faced lengthy lockouts and workers disciplined for taking even the simplest action like wearing union t-shirts.

The negative effects of the National Party's changes to employment law weren't an unforeseen accident – union members from all over the country said this would happen, and we were proven right.

TO THE GOOD...

"The industrial changes announced today start the process of returning to a better quality of life for us all."

The election of the Labour – NZ First – Green Party Government brought hope for positive change, and as the above quote from Richard Wagstaff, president of the Council of Trade Unions, illustrates, the early signs have been good.

In late January, Workplace Relations and Safety Minister Hon Iain Lees-Galloway introduced a new law that would get rid of some of the worst changes brought in by the Key/English Government.

Amongst the changes:

- All collective agreements will be required to contain pay rates, which means pay will have to be negotiated, rather than dictated by bosses;
- Employers won't be able to walk away from collective bargaining, which means they will be obliged to try to find a constructive solution to disagreement;
- Employers also will be forced to discuss a multi-employer collective agreement if their workers want one, rather than

simply being able to say no from the start;

- Every worker will regain the entitlement to rest and meal breaks, and bosses will no longer be able to force employees to work non-stop without time to refresh;
- New workers in workplaces with collective agreements will automatically go onto them, and have 30 days to decide whether or not they will join the union;
- Those same new workers will also be given information about how to join the union;
- When unjustifiably dismissed, workers will once again be able to request a return to their role as the first remedy to the issue, rather than simply seeking a payment in lieu of this;
- Some groups of workers, such as cleaners, who predominantly work for contract agencies, will regain the right to transfer to a new employer when their boss loses a contract, on the same terms and conditions they already have;
- Lastly, employers will no longer be able to deduct wages from

workers who take low-level industrial action (such as refusing to wear uniform, or refusing to work overtime).

The Labour – NZ First coalition agreement also contained a commitment to increasing the minimum wage to \$20 per hour by 2021, with a 75-cent increase coming on April 1 this year. This is a good start, but will see the minimum wage continue to lag well behind the Living Wage (currently \$20.20 per hour).

Lees-Galloway has made clear that this first round of employment law changes will not be all – it is simply getting rid of some of the worst changes made by the last Government, and there are more proactive changes by the new Government still to come.

THOUGH THERE'S STILL SOME UGLY...

Just because we have a Government more inclined to listen to what workers want, it doesn't mean we can be complacent. Already, we've seen a weak response to one vital change that particularly hurts young and migrant workers.

The 90-day fire at will law was introduced under the last Government, and remains popular with National supporters despite research showing it doesn't work for what was proclaimed to be its main purpose: making it easier for young people, and other people disadvantaged in the hunt for jobs, to find meaningful work.

The new Government has decided to partially retain this policy, keeping 90-day "trial periods" for workplaces with fewer than 20 employees. Lees-Galloway admitted in his speech

to Parliament about his proposed changes that:

"They can lead to uncertainty and anxiety for new employees. When employers do dismiss people on trial periods, this may cause significant distress, exacerbated when workers are not provided reasons and where they believe the dismissal is unfair.

The lack of a process for workers to challenge the dismissal may worsen their experience. It may mean that some employees face difficulty in finding subsequent employment if they are dismissed under a trial position without knowing the reason"

“The principle of equal pay for equal work is at the heart of who we are, and one we cannot compromise on.”

Given all these reasons, we have to wonder what possible justification the Government has for keeping these unfair trial periods for anyone. PSA members, as well as our friends in other unions, will be asking the Education and Workforce Committee to recommend that Parliament changes this before passing the new law.

Another bad change made by the previous Government was the introduction of youth rates – a lower minimum wage for young people, even if they're doing the exact same job. The new Government have

committed to discussing this in Cabinet later in 2018, but they have not made a firm commitment to get rid of them since the election.

Union members will have to be vocal about this. The principle of equal pay for equal work is at the heart of who we are, and one we cannot compromise on.

WHAT DO WE WANT? FAIR PAY AGREEMENTS! WHEN DO WE WANT THEM? SOMETIME SOON, I GUESS

The centrepiece of Labour's plans for employment law are Fair Pay Agreements. There's no set time for the legislation for these to be made public, but work on the policy is ongoing, as are discussions with unions and employer groups.

A Fair Pay Agreement will be a set of minimum standards in pay and conditions in an industry. The idea behind them is that, at the moment, there is little incentive for many sectors, particularly when unions aren't present, to offer anything more than the minimum wage.

With unions only present in a small number of private sector employers, it makes it easy for private sector bosses in large industries like retail and hospitality to force wages down and hard for workers to genuinely negotiate better pay for themselves.

Lees-Galloway told the *NZ Herald* that the changing nature of work means the way we set wages and conditions needed to change, saying "we can pretend it's not happening, or we can start making adjustments now that are good for workers, but also support changes that are good for business."

Exactly how Fair Pay Agreements will be negotiated, the role of unions

and their members, and what scope the agreements will have in terms of what they can include, is still up for debate. And while most PSA members won't be hugely impacted by them – as we have strong rates of unionisation in most areas we organise – these agreements will have positive impacts on our friends and whānau, and in particular the people we love who work in areas without a strong union.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO BE HEARD

This Government won't do everything right. The PSA is politically non-partisan, meaning we don't support any one political party. Instead, we advocate for policy that benefits our members, and all of New Zealand.

Accordingly, we need to be prepared to criticise the Government when it gets things wrong, as we always have done. When they get things right, we'll be equally vocal in our support.

What is clear already, however, is that the new Government is more prepared to listen to us and to respond to our concerns, than the previous one was. This gives us an opportunity, and one we would be foolish not to take advantage of.

The things we care about as a union: fair pay and conditions, quality public and community services, and a strong sense of community solidarity and collective action, are good not just for us, but for the whole country. We owe it to each other, to our whānau, and to the generations to come to give it our best shot.

Jacinda Ardern's slogan for the election campaign was Let's Do This. Now the campaign is done. What happens next is up to us. 🇳🇿



In tough times, PSA members stand together in solidarity. These boxes contain thousands of submissions against unfair changes to the Employment Relations Act back in 2013.

Get involved

- Read the proposed changes to employment law: www.goo.gl/6ZmGPL
- The Select Committee will be taking submissions until 30 March, and you can send your thoughts online at: www.goo.gl/bbr8rG

Rūnanga delegates from across the PSA gather to plan and discuss issues relating to Maori PSA members



Trick or Treaty

The Treaty of Waitangi means whatever you want it to mean, as long as you're against it.

COLUMNISTS CONDEMN IT, courts misconstrue it, and activists used to call it a fraud. For tourists visiting this country, this must come across as a little strange. Americans venerate their founding documents. The French do too. On International Human Rights Day thousands of South Africans take to the streets to commemorate their constitutional anniversary. But for a good number of New Zealanders the Treaty seems best left in the 19th century.

We can call this the Don Brash position, and it remains stubbornly popular. In 2011 a UMR poll found only 55 percent of New Zealanders agreed that the Treaty is New Zealand's founding document, a

historical fact so obvious anything less than 100 percent is a worry. In the run-up to Waitangi Day, The AM Show published a poll asking New Zealanders whether we should rename it to New Zealand Day. In the NZ Herald Mike Hosking asked "what's the point" of commemorating our founding day anyway.

From here it might seem as if things are as bleak as they ever were, but beneath the misunderstandings and misconstructions important shifts are happening. In 2012 the Ministry of Education surveyed 4000 year nine students and found that two-thirds agreed the Treaty is New Zealand's founding document. Speaking at the Treaty Grounds in February, Prime

Minister Jacinda Ardern told her audience she is committed to building a country where the Treaty is part of a living history.

UNIONS TAKING ACTION

"The rednecks are never going to put the Treaty back in a box," said Syd Keepa, the Council of Trade Union's vice-president Māori, "and unions helped lead the way." In the 1970s and 80s trade union leaders like the late Syd Jackson were helping lead the movement to secure Treaty justice. "Union members and leaders were at every struggle. The reason Takaparawhā (Bastion Point) remained undeveloped for so long was because union members put a

green ban on the site, that means they wouldn't work on the site as long as Ngāti Whātua opposed it," explained Keepa.

Bastion Point is a promontory above Tāmaki Drive, one of the wealthiest square miles in the country. In 1977, hundreds of activists from the Ōrākei Māori Action Committee occupied Takaparawhā, urging the country to join their calls to end development on one of Ngāti Whātua's last remaining parcels of land. The surrounding land, alongside most of the Auckland isthmus, was taken from local iwi in breach of the Treaty. "When the army and the cops came in in 1978 to take the activists off their own land, union members across Auckland went on a wildcat (illegal) strike," said Keepa.

"This is what the union movement owes Māori under the Treaty – solidarity."

The relationship between Māori and unions reaches back to the turn of the twentieth century. In 1919 Bob Tūtaki, Ngāti Kahungunu, a shearer and union organiser, travelled the country urging Māori to support the formation of the New Zealand Workers' Union. "Let us stand up with one common mind ... stick together, everybody, remember that old Māori philosophy, "tatau tatau", meaning altogether," he would tell his fellow workers. But despite the long relationship, and some famous acts of solidarity along the way, some unions still struggled to include Māori in institutional life with the Waterside Workers' Union head office refusing to print recruitment and advice in te reo Māori for its nearly all- Māori membership on the North Island's East Coast.

WALKING THE TALK

"We're committed to ensuring the PSA walks the talk," said PSA member

and sector māngai for the District Health Board sector Lesley Dixon. "But [we] still have a long way to go and we're still in the early stages of learning how to integrate Te Titiri o Waitangi values of rangatiratanga, whanaungatanga, kaitiakitanga, manaakitanga, kotahitanga, and wairutanga into our operational kaupapa." The PSA represents almost 6000 Māori members in the workplace while the Rūnanga represents Māori members within the union itself.

“This is what the union movement owes Māori under the Treaty – solidarity.”

"The Treaty's profile has certainly increased within the PSA," said Dixon, "we now have the Ngā Kaupapa paper instigated by Te Rūnanga which is committed to the above concepts." But, she added, "there is always room for further discussion about what the Treaty means for the PSA"

Under the Treaty, Article II of the Māori language version – the version preferred by both the Waitangi Tribunal and international law – says Māori retain their "tino rangatiratanga" while the Crown acquires "kāwanatanga." These competing terms are the source of more than a century of angst of where power lies.

Kāwanatanga first appears in the preamble to the Treaty and historian and language expert Professor Margaret Mutu translates it as "governorship over British subjects," meaning kāwanatanga is what is termed a relational concept. Tino rangatiratanga appears later in the document and is usually translated as unfettered chieftainship. So while the English text says that the rangatira who sign surrender their sovereignty to the Crown, the Māori text says the rangatira retain what is the closest power to sovereignty in the Māori world, tino rangatiratanga. In other words, the English text asks rangatira to cede what they just affirmed in the Māori text.

"It's Te Tiriti that matters," adds Keepa, noting that the overwhelming majority of rangatira signed the Māori language version. This also matters in the union context as well: "remember unions aren't the Crown, but they're still part of the Treaty." Tangata whenua on one side – people of the land – and tangata tiriti on the other – people of the Treaty.

The Crown undertook to recognise tino rangatiratanga in exchange for its power to govern its own subjects, but those same subjects – or citizens as we say now – are also bound to recognise Māori as tangata whenua with all the powers of rangatiratanga.

"There's heaps of work to do," Dixon told me. "But it's an exciting time to be part of the Treaty's resurgence and part of the push to see it recognised within the PSA and normalised as the country's founding document." ☺

By Morgan Godfery (Ngāti Awa)



The campaign for mental health services in New Zealand.

When he left Parliament in 2016, Green Party health spokesperson Kevin Hague said his unfinished business as an MP was his campaign to improve mental health services in New Zealand.

BY THEN, HAGUE had already spent a year calling for an inquiry into mental health services. This campaign was motivated by concern at New Zealand's suicide rates and the strain of sustained underfunding on the mental health sector.

Hague's campaign was taken up by his replacement as Green health spokesperson, Julie Anne Genter, and by a number of others outside of Parliament. Amongst them were psychotherapist Kyle MacDonald and comedian Mike King, who teamed up with ActionStation to initiate a People's review of the mental health system. I was involved in that process both as the lead author of the *People's Mental Health Report*, and as a person with my own experience of mental distress and trauma.

A CRISIS IN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The impacts of underfunding in mental health services were already well known to PSA members, as Andy Colwell, DHB mental health specialist and co-convenor of the PSA Mental Health Committee recalls. "Eighteen months out from the election", says Colwell, "there was an

increasing awareness that mental health was in crisis to the extent that the workforce was impacted, as well as service users."

With this in mind, PSA members were encouraged to support the People's Mental Health Review by submitting stories. This helped ensure the review included the experiences of people working in mental health, which in turn meant that the strain on mental health workers was one of the key themes identified in the *People's Mental Health Report*.

Colwell says the stories in the report don't surprise him. "Health workers have mental health problems as well. I know someone who had to leave the DHB because of the impact of this work on their own mental health. If your workforce isn't looked after, how can you provide good mental health services?"

Part of the problem, according to Colwell, is that mental health workers have got used to working in a crisis situation. "We're forced to discharge people who are not well enough to go home. On the other hand, we can't admit people who are

acutely unwell because there are no beds."

This points to the other key themes in the People's Review, which included barriers to access and wait times, the need for a wider range of treatment options, the lack of independent oversight of the sector, entrenched problems including compulsion and the use of seclusion and wider social and economic stresses that contribute to poor mental health in New Zealand.

These themes overlap, with underfunding contributing to not only staff strain and long waiting times but also, for example, to the use of seclusion. Colwell says he would like to see seclusion done away with altogether, but that would require a significant increase in staffing, including more peer support workers who are themselves well supported.

DO WE NEED A REVIEW?

The People's Review picked up Kevin Hague's call for an independent and comprehensive review of mental health, and for the re-establishment of the Mental Health Commission.



Andy Colwell, DHB mental health specialist and co-convenor of the PSA Mental Health Committee



Marianne Elliott, a researcher, writer, human rights advocate and the lead author of the *People's Mental Health Report*.

The review also called for an urgent funding increase for mental health services for acute and community based mental health services nationally.

Some criticized the call for a review, arguing that the problems facing the mental health sector were already well known and understood. But as we researched the report, it became evident that although everyone was clear on the specific problems they experienced in the sector, there was neither widespread agreement on what those problems were, nor consensus on how they could be improved.

AN EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN

At this same time, the PSA was running its powerful Yes We Care campaign, which traveled around the country with 200 life-size cutouts representing health workers missing due to underfunding and with 606 shoes, each representing a Kiwi lost to suicide.

“This was an effective campaign,” reflects Julie Anne Genter, now the Associate Minister of Health, “because it had so many different elements and different groups playing on their strengths. You had the unions with members up and

down the country. You had politicians asking questions in the house. You had service users sharing their stories. You had the media holding the government to account. You had citizens showing up to debates and asking questions about mental health.”

“We need a mental health workforce that is well-supported, well-resourced and listened to.”

THE WORK ISN'T OVER

Ultimately, New Zealanders supported this campaign with their votes and, in January 2018, the new government announced the details of an inquiry into mental health and addiction. But the work for campaigners isn't over, says Julie Anne Genter. “There's still a key question about how the campaign will work with the review to ensure

we get results,” she says, “because we need more than tweaks around the edges. We need clear policy recommendations from this review and we need them to be funded.”

Andy Colwell agrees, and wants to see people who use mental health services working together with those who work in them, not only to highlight problems, but also to shape how services should look in the future.

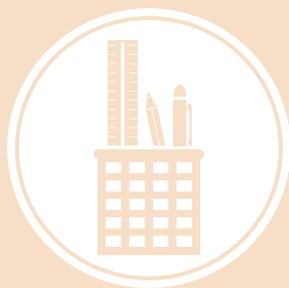
In terms of what that might look like, Colwell hopes the review will result in a significant increase of funding in primary health and more resources in secondary services. “Mental health care is very labour intensive,” he explains, “It's not about tools, it's about people with experience.”

In the long term, he hopes, acute services could be reduced because community services had been improved and economic and social stressors reduced. But in the short term, more beds are needed, along with an overhaul of current services, “but done in a way that takes care of the workforce, and makes mental health a sector people want to work in.”

“We need a mental health workforce that is well-supported, well-resourced and listened to,” says Colwell, “and mental health workers need to recognise the importance of working with people who access the services and to ensure their experiences and views are given more than lip service.” ☺

By Marianne Elliott

Be a part of our continued support of mental health workers, sign up at psa.org.nz/yeswecare



The workplace

by Asher Wilson-Goldman

IF YOU CAN'T STAND THE HEAT...

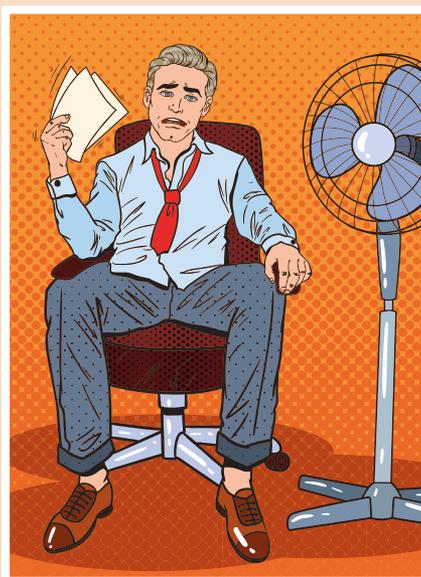
This summer has seen a lot of us struggling with the unusually hot temperatures. Even for summer things have been intense, with parts of the country used to the mid-20s finding themselves in the low-30s for days at a time.

While many people were enjoying the weather while still on leave – at the beach, in the swimming pool or at least under the shade of a tree – a lot of us were back at work, in the office, on the ward or outside in the full heat of the sun.

The ozone layer might be healing but there's still plenty of danger when the weather is like it has been: sunburn, dehydration, overheating and more. It's really important that we look after ourselves, and each other, to keep everyone safe.

In countries that are used to regular 30+ degree temperatures, they have systems set up to cope (and people are more used to it). If you travel to Queensland, the most common type of home is specifically built to allow minimal sun and maximum air flow inside at all times – by contrast, the air flow in New Zealand homes is more likely to come from a lack of insulation and poor maintenance.

Our workplaces are also not set up for heat – in many public service



office buildings, the aircon usually somehow makes different parts of the same floor far too hot and far too cold, while other jobs (like those in kitchens or roles that require the wearing of significant amounts of protective clothing) are likely to be even hotter than the outside temperature.

There's a reason that the *Health and Safety at Work Act* has provisions allowing individual workers to cease unsafe work, and for elected health and safety representatives to direct their colleagues to cease work, without having to go through a lengthy formal process like we do for other types of work stoppage like a strike.

Unite Union members at KFC in Thames used these provisions in

late January, walking off the job under the health & safety law due to significant issues arising from the heat in their kitchen. This collective response shows the importance of sticking together and addressing issues alongside our workmates, not just on our own.

Plenty of other workplaces have addressed the heat in other ways, such as demanding that bosses purchase fans, install proper air conditioning, or approve extra paid breaks in a cooler area to ensure that people aren't putting their health at risk just to do their jobs.

New Zealand's hottest ever day was February 7, 1973. Rangiora, north of Christchurch, registered 42.4 degrees, and other parts of Canterbury and Marlborough also rose above the 40-degree mark.

Staff walkouts due to the heat happened at three freezing works and a glass plant in the morning, and by lunchtime many schools and offices had given up for the day. The tar seal melted on many roads, and railway lines buckled.

We're now heading to autumn and the hottest days are likely gone, but remember: look after yourself, and your colleagues. If you think it's too hot at work, talk with each other, and then with your boss. Your safety is always the most important thing. ☺



Behind the scenes

by Jem Yoshioka

WINNING EQUAL PAY

Disability support worker and PSA delegate Pania Love talks about what it's been like to achieve equal pay, and how she will continue to support the movement.

What do you love most about your job?

The people I work with. Giving them the quality of life. I work with people with multiple disabilities. So non-verbal, in a wheelchair. We do everything for them. We are their eyes, their hands. I have a Down Syndrome daughter, and my Mum and my Nan worked in this field. So I was kinda born into it, it's hereditary.

What made you want to get involved with equal pay?

My work colleagues and I had to pick up extra shifts just to make ends meet. I got involved for all of us. Especially for us as women in a women-dominated industry. The majority of us in my region are Pacific and Māori women, too.

Do you feel the equal pay win has changed the industry as a whole for the better?

Before, our employers used to take anyone off the street, but now they're looking for qualifications. Those with more qualifications get more of a look in.



After equal pay was implemented and we were getting what we deserved, we struggled to find cover because not everyone had to take those hours anymore. Employers also put more workload onto us. So there were positives and negatives.

Do you feel being a part of a union helps push for change?

Most definitely. You need the people to push forward. With equal pay that's how we did it. It was the PSA, but also the whole union movement stepping forward.

It's good there's now a standardised pay scale for community support workers. Employers could put wages up at any time if they wanted to, but they don't want to. We need to continuously put that pressure on them to toe the line.

What do you want to do next with the equal pay campaign?

I'm aiming to push for all of us members, especially in our industry.

We need to get in and back those of us that haven't got [equal pay] yet. I'd like to get more involved with things like lobbying. I've never ever done that, but it's something I want to learn to do.

We need to get in behind our mental health and addiction support workers 100%. It was a sore point for us with [the care and support settlement]. As much as I wanted to jump for joy, I felt I had to hold back because they weren't with us.

Many mental health support workers came over to care and support because they weren't getting recognised for the mahi they were doing by the pay they were getting. But what a waste of skills. You leave all these people who need that support hanging.

Mental health support workers now have to do two or three shifts to fill the gaps of the people who have left. So where does that leave them? Where is their safety net? It's really important we back them up.

What has achieving equal pay meant for you personally?

Not having to struggle to put food on the table. Have a bit of luxury money to do something together as a family. It's made a huge difference to me personally, but that's not what we're about! 🌱



On the job

By Asher Wilson-Goldman

FUNNY WEATHER WE'RE HAVING

Flying into Wellington can be a bit bumpy at times, if not downright frightening. PSA delegate Ciaran Doolin remembers coming home through 100km/h gusts, trying to reassure the panicked person next to him, despite his own fear.

In the end, the plane landed safely, as Ciaran knew it would: in his day job, he's a meteorologist at MetService, currently specialising in aviation forecasting. It's his job to provide forecasts for airports and pilots that enable them to make decisions about flight paths and fuel loads to ensure people get to where they're going safe and sound.

A normal day for Ciaran starts very early in the morning or very late at night. MetService runs a shift rotation, and meteorologists are split into different sections – like aviation, public (the weather we see on their website and the news), and marine (for boaties and shipping).

Each section has its own quirks and differences, says Ciaran. "In aviation you have to think three dimensionally, whereas in marine or public it's just about what's happening on ground. We're forecasting for people flying at all levels, from recreational aircraft at



a few thousand right up to jets at 40,000 feet."

Ciaran says that aviation has probably the highest stakes on a day-to-day basis, so there's a real need to get it right. It's a job that requires an ability to process information and make decisions quickly, but also to trust your own judgement.

"The atmosphere is chaotic, it's difficult to be 100% accurate all of the time, mistakes can be made. If you follow the established procedures which have been developed over many years, then you've done all you can."

At MetService, meteorologists also carry out scientific research and often take on the role of public educator, taking time out to answer questions that journalists use to inform the public.

"There's a significant uptick in interest whenever there's severe weather, or hot temperatures like we had in January," says Ciaran. "If it's

affecting people in a way that isn't typical, there's a huge increase in calls from the media."

This public education is important, because weather is something that most New Zealanders already think themselves experts in. Ciaran sometimes cops flack when he goes

to parties from people who say that MetService has got something wrong, "but when people come into our office and see what we do, they leave with a whole new appreciation for how much effort goes in."

"We use UK, European and US computer modelling, our own internally-produced high-resolution models, an observational network consisting of satellites, radar, weather stations and balloons, plus our knowledge of New Zealand's climatology and the scientific principles behind it all," explains Ciaran. "From all of that, we come up with a synthesis to deliver a forecast."

That's a lot of work in a career Ciaran never expected to have. After studying maths and physics at university, he initially planned to conduct research in cosmology and astrophysics. After looking into job prospects for a cosmologist, however, Ciaran decided he preferred stability of more regular employment, and found meteorology, which ignited a whole new passion. ☺



Connected

by Jem Yoshioka

REAL LIFE, OR JUST FANTASY?

In what's touted by some as the biggest change to our technology since the proliferation of the internet, virtual reality (VR) is the new hot investment option. But for those of us without millions to spend, what does a virtual reality future look like?



VR as we know it

When VR presents itself in popular culture and science fiction, it often brings subversive undertones. If you die in the game, you die in real life. People strapped into intricate devices, losing all sense of reality and control of their physical bodies.

It's an allegory for apathy, for losing perspective on the world and for becoming obsessed with illusions.

In our world VR is a lot less sinister. Much like how video games don't hypnotise you into losing awareness of reality and television didn't ruin a generation, VR is unlikely to make you forget that you need to eat, drink and sleep.

What VR can give you is a sense of wonder and delight, through the immersive way you interact with the projected world around you. Even at its best, though, it's not going to replace the offline world any more than movies, TV or smart phones did in previous years.

Applied virtual reality

While many of the applications for VR are currently experimental, testing the limits of the technology, there's huge implications for many parts of life. Industrial design and architecture stand to benefit hugely. Designers will be able to walk around their creations and truly experience their work in a way you can't when it's projected onto a flat screen. Interior designers will be able to walk through their creations.

Art and tourism could change dramatically – how amazing would it be to be able to tour the Louvre without visiting Paris, without having to wait in line to see the Mona Lisa? Artists can now sculpt 3D shapes with their hands, or even paint in three dimensions.

Could we one day be living and working entirely remotely, meeting in virtual rooms to have discussions, participate in workshops and share presentations? It's probably not as far off as we think.

Accessible virtual worlds

VR has incredible accessibility potential too. A headset is something that can be suited to almost anyone, and controls can be set up to track movement of eyes or hands. Once you get over looking like a huge dork, the experience is eerily immersive.

We need to make sure as we build this technology we need to prioritise the way VR will be made accessible to people with disabilities. If we don't design with accessibility in mind, a device that has the potential to greatly improve lives could instead remain frustratingly inaccessible for many.

VR won't replace the tangible real world we all live in, and it won't ever be able to grant the exact experiences we can find in person. But there's something exciting, delightful and a bit unknown waiting for us in the world inside the headset. 🌐

The road to equal pay

Since the new Labour-led Government was elected, we've been making good progress on the road to equal pay, despite the odd barrier being thrown up in front of us. Thanks to the tireless efforts of our Women's Network, Equal Pay advocates and all 64,000 PSA members, we're still moving forward.

14th Feb

The Government committed to begin negotiations to bring mental health and addiction support workers into the care and support agreement. They were unfairly left out despite doing very similar work, and we want them to get the existing deal ASAP.

21st Feb

Great news for Kristine Bartlett – named New Zealander of the Year for her courageous stance for equal pay. She paid tribute to unions like E tū, which she is a member of, and the PSA, who worked together to win significant pay rises for 55,000 mostly female care and support workers.

22nd Feb

The new Government has scrapped National's terrible proposed anti-equal pay law upon gaining power, but it was drawn at random from a Member's Bill ballot and will get another hearing in Parliament.

More information on how to lobby your local MP to vote against this bad law will be distributed soon.

“*The current government has a different view on how people should treat unions, a different view about the role of unions in society and that will be very clear if they follow our recommendations*”

– PSA National Secretary
Erin Polaczuk

5th March

The Joint Working Group on Pay Equity completed further talks on how the new government should proceed with equal pay legislation. All sides agreed to make it easier to take an equal pay case, removing the word “merit”; make it easier to find roles to compare with to assess how much work should be paid; and to amend the existing 1972 Equal Pay Act, rather than create a whole new law.

The road ahead

The draft bill should be circulated over in the next few months. PSA members will feed into the select committee process to support equal pay, and advice will be sent out on how to do this.

Pay processes must become more transparent, pay must be in collective agreements; employers must be obliged to do the right thing; and there needs to be fines for any breaches of the Equal Pay Act.

Separately, another Joint Working Group – on Mixed Work Principles (for jobs that aren’t traditionally women dominated) – will recommend the State Services Commission adopt a set of high-level principles to stop women being paid less across the wider state sector.

These will include wage discrimination but also starting salaries, progression, flexible work and transparency.

UK civil service on the cusp of Brexit

In one year, the United Kingdom is expected to begin to leave the European Union. Yet, even with the transition extension that's currently being discussed, it's unclear what a post-Brexit Britain will look like.

AS CIVIL SERVANTS work to prepare and deliver on Brexit, some politicians have taken aim at them, suggesting that some may be trying to “sabotage” Britain’s exit from the EU. Dave Penman, general secretary of senior public servant and professional union FDA, said in an opinion piece late last year:

“As the realities of trying to deliver Brexit start to bite – laying bare the incoherent and contradictory positions of both government and opposition – the scapegoating of the civil service has begun in earnest. Perhaps it was always going to be thus, but it is no less disappointing for its predictability.”

In reality, the civil service is already under intense pressure. A recent report by the Home Affairs Committee on the ability of the Home Office to deliver new

immigration processes following Brexit found that “existing processes are under strain, and under-resourced”.

The report questioned the ability of the Home Office to recruit enough staff to address the current situation, “let alone provide the resources required to cope with the increased workload and challenge that Brexit will bring”.

The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), the union of the majority of Home Office staff, gave evidence to the committee in November. Following the release of the report, PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said that it “highlights the chaos and confusion at the heart of government on Brexit. Whilst six different cabinet ministers make speeches showing six different versions of Brexit, on

the ground the lack of organisation is staggering.”

If there’s a silver lining for civil servants, it could be that to get Brexit over the line is going to require a trusted and supported civil service.

Political journalist Sue Cameron recently interviewed Lord Butler, cabinet secretary from 1988 to 1998, for the BBC series *Inside Number 10*. She wrote in *Civil Service World* in February that Lord Butler believes that Brexit “will be a renaissance for the civil service, reversing the trend of the last two decades when ministers increasingly relied on political advisers at the expense of officials”. ☺

By Shelly Biswell

International survey of union rights

THE ITUC IS the global body for trade unions – made up of millions of workers from across the world, including nearly every industry and sector that you can imagine.

Our 64,000 members are included in that, along with all of the other unions affiliated to the NZ Council of Trade Unions.

Currently, the ITUC is updating

its *Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights*, a database of the legal situation for workers all over the world.

New Zealand’s entry was last updated in 2014, so the CTU has helped to coordinate a response with all of the changes to employment law, and major breaches of workers’ rights, that have happened over the past four years.

Tools like the *Survey* are important, as they help to inform the ITUC’s priorities for international lobbying and campaigns.

Just like the PSA supports our sister unions across New Zealand, ITUC members can support each other from across the globe. ☺

Find out more:

survey.ituc-csi.org/?lang=en

When the rules are broken: railway workers denied the right to strike

In June 2017, more than 7,000 union members working for the New South Wales railways started a new round of collective bargaining.

WHILE HISTORICALLY COLLECTIVE bargaining in the public sector has often been lengthy and problematic, the 2017 bargaining round was not expected to be particularly complex.

Unfortunately, that was not to prove true, and, after more than six months of negotiations, union members overwhelmingly supported taking industrial action.

Australian industrial relations laws are extremely anti-worker, containing fundamental breaches of international labour standards and conventions. This includes a range of onerous legal requirements put upon unions.

Industrial action must be approved by the Fair Work Commission, and is subject to the burdensome provisions of the *Fair Work Act 2009*. Even once approved, it can be revoked by the Commission at any time.

After jumping through the many required hoops, NSW rail workers began industrial action in late January 2018.

In addition to the wearing of union badges and t-shirts, an indefinite overtime ban was implemented and notice provided for a 24-hour stoppage on 29 January 2018.

The employers applied to the Commission to stop the industrial action, on the grounds that the *Fair*



Rail, Tram and Bus Union NSW members show solidarity on their union's facebook page during industrial action.

Work Act 2009 allows employers to suspend or stop any action that could cause significant economic harm, or endanger the health and safety of members of the public.

The Commission ruled that a 24-hour strike would do both of these, and suspended all industrial action for six weeks. Despite doing everything asked by unfair labour laws, public sector railway workers had their right to strike taken away.

Union members are now forced to continue bargaining without the leverage of industrial action,

which may be suspended again after the initial six-week period. It is clear that the Australian industrial relations laws are rigged in such a way that bosses have all of the power, and are even able to prevent union members taking working together effectively to improve their wages and working conditions.

A drastic shift, in both legislation and attitudes towards economic and power imbalances, is desperately needed. ☹️

By Jessica Epps (RTBU Industrial Officer)

A
ood
to join
nion



Networks

Art Daniel and Gene Saunders,
Out@PSA members
with Green MP Jan Logie

Proud to be out, proud to be union.

WORK MAKES UP a large part of our lives. It's well documented that the more of yourself you can bring to work, the better you feel. We should be free to express our sexuality and gender in a way that is true for us. Knowing you work somewhere that will be accepting, supportive and encouraging can go a long way to improving your overall quality of life.

While in New Zealand it's illegal to discriminate against someone because of their gender or sexual orientation, it does still happen. You could face difficulties like struggling to be promoted, targeted for harassment or bullying, or forced to operate in an environment that is unpleasant or hostile to you because of who you are.

This is why we have the Out@PSA network. We advocate for inclusion and celebration of our diverse workforce here in New Zealand. We also advocate for public services that

meet all of our needs, which are as diverse as we are.

In the last year the Out@PSA network has doubled in number. Almost 400 members have joined since January 2017. Now over 800 members are a part of the network, and it's still growing. We are so excited to have so many more people standing with us, being proud to be out in their workplaces and with their union.

February is always a busy time for the network, with Pride events happening around the country.

The Auckland Pride Parade drew massive crowds as usual, and we got to show off our new network t-shirts. The Big Gay Out was unfortunately rained out, and we really missed spending that time with our Auckland community. We were happy to be a part of the friendly atmosphere at the Wellington Out in the Park event, which is entering its 32nd year.

It's back to work now. Armed with a new committee and a new logo, we're excited to be growing the network and increasing our activity, with the full support of the PSA behind us. We'll continue to push for change both in our workplaces and in the services we provide to people living in New Zealand.

We're excited for the CTU's Out@Work biennial conference, which is the main conference for Out@Work members. This year it will be held in Auckland at the Vaughn Park Conference Centre on 30 November and 1 December.

Supporting and advocating for change is something unions do best, and while it still sometimes takes bravery to be out, we're proud to be making it easier.

To join Out@PSA, visit psa.org.nz/out or call us on **0508 367 772**. ☎

NETWORK BRIEFS



SWAN

The Social Workers' Action Network is focused on the proposed

Social Work Registration Bill.

The Bill would make registration mandatory for all social workers. While mandatory registration is something many organisations have been pushing for, this bill has several issues that will mean more trouble than good for social work.

The way the bill is currently written, there is no solid definition provided for social work, leaving it up to

employers to define. This means employers only have to change someone's job title from social worker to something else to avoid the mandatory registration.

This could impact equal pay for social workers. If employers have to pay someone with the title 'social worker' a specific wage, they will likely try to skirt the law and employ people under another title.

We will be calling on all PSA members who are social workers to make their voices heard on this bill.

Lobbying MPs and other actions will be necessary to make sure positive changes happen and that any bill to regulate social work actually supports rather than diminishes us.

The SWAN leadership hui for activist training is taking place on 20 and 21 March. Attendees will have one on one time with our expert campaign and communications team, as well as support from our policy team on how best to communicate, campaign and lobby for the interests of social workers and those we work alongside.



PSA YOUTH

Youth Leadership Training is currently underway, with successful training

sessions held in Hamilton

and Dunedin. We received more than 90 expressions of interest to attend from Auckland members, and so we've been forced to schedule a second day of training

– a great problem to have! We are hoping to do repeats sessions in more centres in May, including Hamilton and other regional areas.

Our fabulous convenor team have planning days scheduled for early April, and no doubt these will help to kick off some exciting plans for the rest of the year.

We are excited to welcome new PSA organiser Alexandra Ward to the PSA Youth team. She will be providing support to Lauren Hourigan, who is the lead staff member for the network.

"I think this is awesome timing, coming on board at the time that there's such a huge amount of interest in Youth Leadership Training," said Alexandra. "I'm excited to try and use that interest to make even more cool things happen in this space."



PASEFIKA NETWORK

Warm Pacific greetings to all our Pasefika members. Last year we held a Fono in Wellington, with the focus on the equal pay.

While across government, women are paid 14% less than men, for Pacific women this difference is even greater – about 20%. The Fono also discussed why Pacific people choose certain roles than often pay less. We will continue the conversation at our next Fono in Auckland on 23 March.

DEAF & DISABLED NETWORK

The Deaf and Disabled members' network has a new PSA organiser supporting them. Joe Kelly, a recent addition to the PSA, works with members in the Community Public Services sector in roles like home support, disability support and with several non-government organisations. Prior to working for the PSA he worked for FIRST Union for 5 years. Joe has been a PSA member and a PSA delegate in his previous time in public service before becoming a union organiser.



WANT TO JOIN A NETWORK?

Some of the most active and interesting work that happens within the PSA is spurred by our networks. If you're interested in getting involved you can go online to psa.org.nz/networks or give us a call on **0508 367 772**.



Solidarity across sectors

Last month PSA members and staff were heavily involved in supporting a group of Wellington hospitality workers who had lost their jobs and holiday pay when the restaurant they worked at closed down.

FIVE BOROUGHS WAS a well-known American-style diner. In January, its owners announced it was going into receivership, with staff owed more than \$34,000 in holiday pay. To add insult to injury, the same owners reopened a “new” Five Boroughs restaurant just 10 minutes’ walk away.

Staff were desperate to get their entitlements, but didn’t know where to turn for help, as, like most of the hospitality industry, they were not union members. They sought legal advice, but this only told them that the liquidation process was legally sound, and they found themselves in a very precarious situation.

Things looked pretty grim, until Unions Wellington got in contact with them. Unions Wellington is one of a number of cross-union organisations around the country. The different regional groups are active in a variety of ways, but their purpose is to provide inter-union collaboration and support in their area.

Unions Wellington is convened by PSA organiser Ben Peterson, who explains why it didn’t matter to him that the Five Boroughs staff weren’t union members:

“The majority of working people aren’t members of unions, and many workplaces don’t have easy access to unions. This is not just a problem for those staff, but is a problem for working people as a whole. Un-unionised sectors drive wages and conditions down, and undermine the hard won gains in sectors that are unionised.”

According to Ben, it is particularly important that unions look for ways to give young people good union experiences. “Hospitality workers are predominately young people with long lives of work ahead of them,” he says, “and helping to support them and bring them into the union family now will have life-long impact for them, their friends and their future colleagues.”

Ultimately, Unions Wellington was in a position to help, and in principle,

unions have an obligation to stand with fellow workers and support wherever we can.

The former staff launched a quick campaign with Unions Wellington support. The staff and Unions Wellington arranged to meet with the former employers together as a group, and got active in the media about how they were being treated.

The resulting negative publicity led to a miraculous change of tone from the employer. Suddenly, customers were coming into the new store to complain about how they had treated their staff. The employers found some money, and staff were paid their holiday pay entitlement by the end of the week. Staff who stayed on in the new restaurant are now talking to Unite Union to explore membership there and to make sure they are protected in the future.

Five Boroughs staff would like to thank PSA staff and members for their support, and promise that next time there’s a dispute, they’ll be there to return the favour! ☺

Industrial update

ORANGA TAMARIKI

It's bargaining year at Oranga Tamariki and we have started to prepare for the work ahead. Delegates who want to express their interest in being part of the bargaining team will be able to do this in late April or early May.

Members meetings will be held in May and again in July to discuss what we want to address in bargaining. However, if you have a burning issue for Oranga Tamariki ready now you can let your national delegate know at any time. They can collate this and feed it directly into the process later in the year.

As this is the first bargaining since Oranga Tamariki separated from the Ministry of Social Development, there will be lots of work to make the necessary changes. Members should keep an eye out for meeting notices, surveys and updates via email to make sure that nobody misses the chance to have their say.

INLAND REVENUE (IR)

Our members at IR have been inspirational in the way they have collectively held strong during a very stormy time.

After the Employment Court's decision in *NZ Public Service Association v Inland Revenue*

Department, IR and the PSA have signed a Commitment Document setting out how both sides will work together through this Business Transformation process.

Members at IR agreed to support it, but believe IR have a long way to go to rebuild their trust. They are hopeful that IR will reset their engagement with union members.

Meanwhile, bargaining continues towards a new collective agreement, with the priority claims being a new remuneration system, an across the board pay increase and significant improvements to the management of change clause. ☺



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Around & about

facebook.com/nzpsa to see more photos of union activity



Out@PSA members at Auckland Pride Parade



PSA Youth leadership training, Dunedin



PSA Youth leadership training, Hamilton



Housing NZ delegates



Emerge Aotearoa bargaining team



PSA organiser Caz Thompson and PSA national secretary Glenn Barclay at the Living Wage stall, Newtown Festival

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CHUBB®



The unsung heroes of local government

SEVEN AND A bit years ago I accidentally* got myself elected to local government. It was a time of change for council in Auckland, with amalgamation and the new super city structure. None of us really knew what we were in for, including the staff, most of whom had mapped over from jobs in the old structures. There was an atmosphere of cautious excitement; we knew it would be an adventure but not quite where we were going or how we would get there.

I write “we” quite deliberately, because for those of us who were there right at the start of the new Auckland Council, both staff and elected members, it has been a ride we’ve gone on together. Some have gone and others have come, and still this rollercoaster rattles on, sometimes smoothly, sometimes with a shake, and sometimes we have to get out and push. As an elected member, I know that often it’s staff who are putting their shoulders to the rear of the carriage, while we politicians are left thinking we’re gliding effortlessly downhill.

Quite simply, I couldn’t do the job I do without the hard work of council staff behind the scenes. I’ve been very impressed by the high calibre

of most of the officers I’ve dealt with; smart, articulate, passionate, effective, and more than that really committed to making this complex organism work as best it can to deliver for our communities.

When I turned up with a newborn baby to symposiums and meetings back in 2010 (and again in 2015) staff were welcoming and accommodating. There was no questioning of baby’s presence from staff, no criticism of my dual role, even when Rod Oram nearly ran one of them over with a Yike Bike. If only my elected colleagues had been so enabling!

During my term as chair, advisers would meet with me regularly to work out how to get to where the board wanted to go, which levers to pull, which committees to go through, which other officers could help along the way, how to engage and involve our community in each venture. That collaboration really helped me to be an effective leader, and assisted our local board to get better results too. I’ve learnt a great deal from council staff, not least a bunch of acronyms that I can now demystify for constituents trying to tell the LTP from the RLTP from the LRT.**

Most of the time when a politician looks good, it’s at least partly because staff have made it happen. When we open a refurbished building, it has absolutely been a team effort, including not just elected members making decisions and staff carrying them out, but also the community who have had input and helped pay for it, the contractors who do the wiring and the painting, and so much more. Each time we build or improve an asset, deliver a service to our community or put on an event, it’s proof again that people do things better when we work together.

Thank you to the many amazing local government staff who have enabled our community, and me, over the years. Thank you for telling me when I was heading the wrong way, letting me know that the budget was smaller than I remembered, and for discretely telling me know when I had baby sick on my jacket. Thank you for those little things and for so much more. I look forward to finding out what we can do next, together. ☺

* *The next two times were on purpose.*

** *Long Term Plan (LTP), Regional Land Transport Plan (RLTP), Light Rail Transit (LRT)*

By Julie Fairey (deputy chair, Puketāpapa Local Board, Auckland)

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