

ABS proof of pay fallacy

by Barry Fitzgerald*

In late March, the Australian Bureau of Statistics released the latest set of employee earning figures (from May 1991).

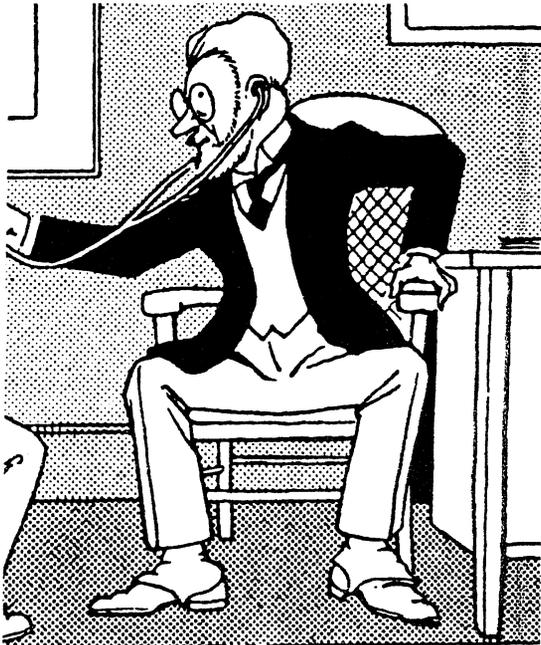
The media and politicians have been strangely silent on the matter of lawyers salaries since.

Before taking into account overheads (which may range from 30-50% of a lawyer's gross salary), the ABS reported the gross weekly earnings of lawyers was \$777.10 per week.

Translated into an annual gross salary, this is \$40,400.

Of course, some leading practitioners earn considerably more than \$40,400. But the inference, created by the top-of-the-head flights of fantasy of newspaper sub-editors and point-scoring politicians (usually using the figure of \$2,000 to \$3,000 per day as the unsubstantiated throwaway line), that lawyers as a group are money-grabbing fat-cats is demonstrably false.

The relative salary of lawyers can be more clearly seen in the table below which summarises the ABS salary statistics of the twenty highest paid occupational groups.



The banner headline in the Brisbane Courier Mail screamed "Doctors Win Pay Stakes."

The page 2 spread in the Adelaide Advertiser was "Doctors Earn Most." Can you imagine the glee of the writers if lawyers had

topped the list!

But no, there are the lawyers at the number 17 ranking, just two spots ahead of painters, decorators and signwriters and 20 percent behind the blasting trades workers in terms of gross salary.

Curiously, there was no reference in the very extensive listing (327 occupations) of the gross salaries of state or federal politicians.

That absence is even more odd because the ABS data reported in the Advertiser on 15 August 1991 that at

May 1990 "Legislators and Government officials" were grossing \$1555 per week compared to lawyers' average income of \$694.

If the gross average lawyer's salary had edged up from \$694 to \$777 in that time, I wonder what happened to the politicians' \$1555.

Even that figure would put the pollihs way out in front on the list!

*Dr Barry Fitzgerald is the Executive Director of the Law Society of South Australia. This piece was extracted from the May edition of the LSSA's Bulletin.

1 GPs	1095
2 Specialists (medical)	1079
3 Mining engineers	1059
4 Air/sea transport support workers	1032
5 Chemical engineers	990
6 Blasting trades	969
7 Petroleum/gas plant operators	892
8 Hoist winch & lift operators	872
9 Metallurgists	861
10 Ship's pilot/deck officers	856
11 Engineering techs	810
12 Marine engineers	806
13 Dentists	797
14 Geologists	783
15 Electrical engineers	782
16 Other engineers	778
17 LAWYERS	777
18 Civil engineers	772
19 Painters/decorators	770
20 Uni/CAE teachers	770

REQUIEM FOR THE COMMON LAW?

A lecture by Lord Oliver of Aylmerton in Supreme Court No 1 at 5.00pm on Tuesday 11 August. Practitioners and friends are welcome to attend.

This lecture is sponsored by the Public Purposes Trust.

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