

Union of Australian Women Newsletter



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August 2013

WHAT'S ON

Monday 5 August 12 noon	UAW Darebin Group meeting Northcote Town Hall meeting room
Tuesday 6 August	Hiroshima Day
Thursday 8 August 10.30 – 12.30	UAW Book Group 2 nd floor meeting room Ross House
Friday 9 August	Nagasaki Day
Saturday 10 August 3.00 – 5.00pm	Peace Concert will commemorate the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and raise awareness of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. Deakin Edge, Federation Square Japanese for Peace, MAPW and ICAN \$20/\$15
Monday 12 August 1.30 – 12.30	UAW Organising Committee 2 nd floor meeting room Ross House
Thursday 15 August 11.00am - 2.00pm	UAW-Seniors Network 2 nd floor meeting room Ross House
Saturday 17 August 2pm	UAW Southern Branch Mordialloc Neighbourhood House Main St Mordialloc Amy: 9547 6167; Mairi: 9587 8757 See enclosed flyer
Monday 26 August	UAW Film Group

COFFEE WITH A FOCUS ON ASYLUM SEEKERS:

ASRC Speaker: JENN CLARKE

By Carmen Green

On July 17th, Jenn Clarke, Youth and Students' Coordinator, from the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre (ASRC), spoke to a UAW meeting on the vitally important issue of asylum seekers. Given the increasingly hard-line approach on this issue by both Australia's major political parties in a Federal election year, we wanted a speaker from the ASRC to bring us up to date on this issue.

Who are Asylum Seekers? Asylum seekers and refugees are the same people-

- An **asylum seeker** is applying for a Protection visa
- A **refugee** has a protection visa and is **SAFE**

An asylum seeker must meet 8 criteria to be determined a refugee:

- They are outside their home country
- They are afraid to go home
- They believe that if they go home they will face persecution
- They are afraid persecution will happen to them for one of five reasons:

Political opinion

Religion

Race

Nationality

Social group

Examples of social groups facing persecution are homosexuals in Ethiopia, journalists in Sri Lanka, academics in Iraq or women in Afghanistan.

- Their fear of persecution is well founded
- They cannot relocate in their home country to find safety
- The government in their home country cannot protect them
- They cannot go and live in a safe third country.

You cannot gain refugee status if you are simply going hungry in your own country (i.e. an economic refugee) or because of a natural disaster (e.g. Pakistan's floods). The motivating factor for refugees is safety and protection from persecution and human rights abuse, not economic advantage.

Why do people come by boat? They are often unable to get a passport or visa. Coming by boat shows how desperate asylum seekers are that they are willing to sell everything they have to secure a place on an unsafe boat knowing how many other people have drowned making similar voyages.

It is not illegal to seek asylum in Australia even if arriving by boat or plane. They are permitted to enter without a prior authorization because this right is protected by Article 31 of the 1951 Refugee Convention.

For many asylum seekers Australia is the closest country that is a signatory to the Refugee Convention. Malaysia and Indonesia are not signatories to the convention.

If it's not illegal to be an asylum seeker why do people go into detention? Detention centres are justified on administrative grounds – for identity, security and health checks.

Average duration of detainment: 17 days USA, France 10 days, Canada 8 days, Sweden 7 days – compare Australia **224 days**.

'Illegals' are people who overstay their visas. The vast majority of these in Australia are from western countries including thousands of British tourists. There are at least 50,000 illegal immigrants in Australia.

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ASRC Speaker: JENN CLARKE

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Why don't asylum seekers stay in the first country they come to? Poor living conditions, lack of safety and discrimination can force asylum seekers to move to another country.

The world's poorest countries bear the burden of the majority of refugees.

Majority of asylum seekers go first to a country in their region usually a neighbouring country to seek protection e.g. refugees fleeing from Syria ; 24,800 Syrian asylum claims in industrialized countries compares to more than 1,100,000 registered Syrian refugees currently in neighbouring countries such as Turkey.

The UN estimates that approximately 70% of the world's refugees have fled to developing countries.

In 2011/12- 90% of boat arrivals in Australia were found to be genuine refugees.

As of July 2010, boat arrivals constituted less than 2% of Australia's total migration program numbers.

Asylum Seeker applications: Australia's world ranking:

Per total number of asylum claims: 23rd Per capita: 32nd Per GDP: 60th

In 2012 Australia received 15,800 applications compared with 355,000 for Europe and 103,900 for Nth America. In Australia 60% of applications to the Department of Immigration are refused- in contrast 80% of appeals to the Refugee Tribunal are accepted. It can take up to 11 years to get a protection visa during which the terrible uncertainty brings great stress to the people concerned.

Current asylum seeker policy in Australia has become much less humane. Jen described the no advantage policy after 13 August 2012 – no family reunion and no work or study rights for up to 5 years. The large number of children in detention and offshore processing were also discussed.

Since Jenn gave her talk the Rudd Government has proposed making refugee policy even more draconian by making an agreement with the government of Papua New Guinea to transfer Australian asylum seekers arriving by boat to that impoverished third world country. Our newspapers are running full page advertisements warning people not to come to Australia by boat. Obviously the ALP Federal Government lead by Rudd is prepared to do anything to win the federal election no matter how callous the policy or how much it trashes Australia's international reputation.

What does ASRC do? ASRC offers:

A foodbank- providing food to 160 families per week

Meals – community meals- 120 people on average per day

Material Aid- public transport tickets, nappies, phone calls etc

Legal Assistance-winning protection for 130 people

Health -125 appointments per week –doctors/nurses, physiotherapists, massage, acupuncture, podiatry, dental

Counselling –over 140 sessions per month

Education –English program, training programs TAFE etc

And much more....

What can we do to help the ASRC?

Donate dollars, food or volunteer our time. The UAW has a list of food & other items most needed by the ASRC – ring, email for a copy to be forwarded.

For more information on the ASRC see www.asrc.org.au

NOTES FROM THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE JULY 2013

Anne Sgro

Left Wing Ladies: Chapter 8, *Having a Voice: Making a Difference* has been completed! Morag Loh has done a terrific job in bringing the UAW history up to 2012. She will follow through with the names of possible printers, and we look forward to having a celebratory launch later in the year.

Older members. The meeting had an update on several older members: Lila Ratcliffe, Olga Silver, Gwen Goedecke – and others who have been unwell. We have a contact in the office for Gwen if members wish to get in touch.

Letter to Julia Gillard. A decision was made to write a letter of support to the former Prime Minister.

I write on behalf of Union of Australian Women members to thank you for the strength, courage, tenacity and leadership that you showed throughout your term as Prime Minister.

Yours was a minority government that achieved an impressive amount of legislation, much of which showed foresight and planning for a better future for all Australians. Your ability to negotiate was impressive and you showed great humour and grace not only in the face of continued misogynistic attacks but also in relation to the whiteanting from within your own party. We pay tribute to those who worked with you, respected and supported you as first female Prime Minister.

We have supported the Victorian Women's Trust in its campaign for respect and decency in relation to people, democratic institutions and a civil society.

We hope that your prediction that it will be easier for the next female Prime Minister is true, but believe that we can take no such thing for granted. We will continue to campaign for gender equity, a change in Australian society that means that we can celebrate women in leadership, and an end to sexism and violence at every level.

We wish you all the best for the future.

IAW CONGRESS, London, 9-14 September 2013

SAFETY-CHOICES-VOICES: Post 2015 Women's Development Goals.

What is going to replace the current UN 2015 Development Goals? This is the big debate around the world and women's voices must be heard in decision making at all levels: in the family through to globally. This explains the theme of the IAW Congress.

Safety for women is a must

Women should be able to make their own **choices**

Women's **voices** must be heard in decision making at all levels.

The host is the UK All Pakistan Women's Associations.

The UAW, along with fellow affiliates WEL and Victorian League of Women Voters Victoria, has provided the congress with a report.

AUDIENCE WITH THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL

Carol Stals was following a long UAW tradition of acknowledging work, initiatives or campaigns that are well done when she recently wrote a personal letter of appreciation to Quentin Bryce. She was amazed to receive an invitation to meet with the Governor-General. Carol took a gift from the UAW with her – our two books and the DVD of our history, wrapped in lavender paper and tied with the Colours.

I had a 30 minute audience with her. She was relaxed and very friendly. We discussed education, social justice, the Law and Union of Australian Women, of which we are both members. She talked about her deep and long friendship with the Queensland UAW and how helpful they were when she was a young lawyer and starting out in public life. When she held her papers her hands shook badly. They gave her strategies and look where she is now.

I felt really comfortable. The biggest surprise was that she opened the door herself. I expected to be shown in. She is very touchy and left me with kisses on both cheeks. Up close she is the most physically beautiful person I have ever seen, her skin is magnificent.

Carol was impressed by her stamina for the busy schedule that she maintains.

SAUDI ACTIVISTS PUNISHED

Thanks to **Morag Loh** for sending in the following.

Human Rights Watch has reported that on June 15th this year a Saudi court convicted two women, both human rights activists, to 10 months jail and a two year travel ban. Wajeha al-Huwaider and Fawzia al-Oyouni were found guilty of 'inciting a woman against her husband.' They had attempted to help a Canadian woman, Natalie Morin, who is married to Sa'eed al Sharani, and lives with him and their three children in Damman Province. Natalie and her children are all Canadian citizens. Sa'eed had locked Natalie in their house with inadequate food and water, at one stage leaving her there for three weeks while he went away. Wajeha's and Fawzia's crime was to try to get supplies to her.

Wajeha has told Human Rights Watch that she feels she is being punished not only for this matter but also for ten years of unrelated activism around women's rights. For example, in 2011, when it was illegal for women to drive, she was a passenger in a car which was being driven by a woman.

If you wish to ask for a reviewed sentence for Wajeha and Fawzia and for humane treatment for Natalie write to the Ambassador for Saudi Arabia in Australia, PO Box 9162, Deakin, ACT 2600 or at auemb@mofa.gov.sa

A PRICE ON CARBON

On July 2nd the Australian Conservation Foundation announced that in the year since the introduction of a price on carbon Australia has used 13% less brown coal power and 28% more clean energy. At a time when Obama is calling for action in the USA and China is pricing carbon in big cities why are we backtracking? Opinion polls show that a majority of Australians are now in favour of pricing carbon. Call your Federal MP and ask for stronger action to reduce green house gas emissions.

ARE WE REALLY STILL TALKING ABOUT THIS?

Contraception, family planning and reproductive services in rural areas

Review of article by Anne Sgro

Emily Lee-Ack is the Executive Officer of Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West. She has an interesting article in the Victorian Women's Trust's Sheilas (<http://sheilas.org.au/2013/07/are-we-really-still-talking-about-this/>).

In 2012, the rural Women's Health Services undertook groundbreaking research into the availability of family planning services in rural and regional areas. What, the group wondered, had been the impact of abortion law reform, and an increased focus on reproductive choice in Victoria? What impact had a national debate on the availability of RU486 had on service provision and community awareness?

The research was conducted by a survey of health service providers, community health, local government, GPs and family support services. Two hundred and twenty-five respondents from across Victoria completed the survey, representing each of the rural Victorian regions.

The article makes for confronting though not surprising reading and it is obvious that there are entrenched problems:

- The power that pharmacists can wield in the dispensing of contraception
- The short supply of specialist medical staff
- Difficulties of distance and lack of transport to access services that are not necessarily available every day
- High costs of contraception, for young people in particular
- Perceived lack of confidentiality, anonymity and privacy can be an issue in small towns
- Lack of availability of information. This was particularly relevant in response to the provision of abortion services, and there is a general lack of information about access to medication and surgical abortion.
- There was ongoing concern by respondents that community attitudes were leading to the stigmatisation of those who sought family planning and sexual health services.

There was also particular focus on the perception that some service providers are not providing full services to some or all of their clients as a result of cultural or conscientious objections.

Reading the article took me back to 1965 Edenhope in Victoria's south-west, my first teaching position. The local GP was a staunch Catholic who refused to prescribe the contraceptive pill. Women would travel 30 miles across the South Australian border to Naracoorte to find a more "obliging" doctor or clinic. That is nearly 50 years ago! Obviously much has changed in that time but the above concerns need addressing and there is significantly more work to be done to ensure that women have equitable access to sexual and reproductive health services. Emily Lee-Ack remains optimistic. But I read about the results of the survey while keeping in mind the issues raised in recent articles in the Newsletter by Cath Morrison about abortion rights in the face of changes in several US states and continued conservatism in Australia (July 2012, May 2013). It all goes together. Congratulations to rural Women's Health Services for doing the work and giving the insight.

STALKING JULIA: The role of the media in Australian politics

By Anne Sgro

A number of writers have recently taken up the question of gender and misogyny in Australia (see June Newsletter). The issue has at long last been shown the light of day. But what of the role of the media in all this? I was part of a packed audience at the Wheeler Centre recently at a discussion on *The Stalking of Julia Gillard. How the media and Team Rudd contrived to bring down the prime minister*. Author, former Press Gallery journalist Kerry-Anne Walsh was joined by Jonathon Holmes, James Button and Jeff Sparrow.

The discussion was thoughtful and far-ranging, examining the role of the media in modern politics, particularly in view of the weakening of hard copy daily newspapers.

Was Labor wrong to get rid of Rudd? No, but the timing was wrong because Australians had not realised what was going on, and Gillard had not had time to prepare. She was seen as a poor communicator. The question of the role of her minders and speechwriters was not really addressed. How could a warm, funny clever speaker and parliamentary performer present so often in a wooden manner?

What role did journalists play? It is a relatively new thing for journalists to intervene so personally, to become pundits rather than reporters, to use anonymous sources for their opinions, to focus on endless polls rather than investigative journalism. There was very little praise for the Gillard Government, rather a collective voice of condemnation. Where was the analysis? Should there be a revisiting of journalists ethics?

The concentration of media ownership is an important factor. News Ltd campaigned against the government and Julia Gillard, but was Murdoch himself driving this? The shock jocks were somewhat dismissed by the panel as appealing to a limited audience of ageing males – if that is true, they still had a formidable influence and helped set the tone. And while investigative journalism is still alive (the Sydney Morning Herald and the Eddie Obeid story was mentioned), it is expensive and carried out less by the broadsheets and more by online reporting: Guardian Online, New Matilda, Crikey.

And the role of big business and its influence? An audience member raised this issue particularly in regard to the Mining Tax, the outpouring of anger by the huge mining companies, and the subsequent watering down of legislation. This was acknowledged by the panel rather than addressed.

In reaction to the now famous misogyny speech which was acclaimed overseas, the Press Gallery was dismissive because they thought that Gillard was playing the gender card. How out of touch were they? And how big a factor was gender in the campaign against the former Prime Minister? **Was gender the main issue? It was not everything and it was not nothing**, to paraphrase Julia Gillard herself. Jonathon Holmes is convinced that the Rudd destabilisation was the major factor. However, it was agreed that it will probably be a long time, more than a generation, before another woman puts her hand up for the top job.

The Wheeler Centre offers terrific opportunities for ideas and discussion at little or no cost. What a wonderful way to keep politics alive.

WAR AND ITS CONTINUING AFTERMATH

By Anne Sgro

I had just started to read **The Yellow Birds** by American poet Kevin Powers when I came across a small report in the Age (15 July 13). It referred to the number of suicides among British soldiers and veterans – more committed suicide than were killed in battle, the article states: *The Ministry of Defence said 7 soldiers killed themselves while a further 14 died in suspected suicides. An investigation by the BBC's Panorama found at least 29 veterans took their own lives this year.*

And what of Australian soldiers and veterans? The ABC has reported that many are struggling, and that the support they receive from Defence authorities leaves much to be desired.

Kevin Powers served as a machine gunner with the US Army in Iraq. On his return home he was often asked: *What was it like over there?*

The Yellow Birds is a novel. The story alternates between Iraq 2004 and Virginia, Richmond 2005. It tries to answer this question, offering a powerful insight into the impact of war on both sides and their families, and never being able to leave the memories behind. It is not an easy read, but worth the effort.

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