

Union of Australian Women Newsletter



Victoria Inc. A00021219R
Ross House, 2nd Floor
247 Flinders Lane
Melbourne 3000
Ph. /Fax 9654 7409
Email: uawv@vicnet.net.au

December 2013

What's On- December 2013/ January 2014

Best wishes to all members and friends for the festive season. We hope that you look after yourselves, and have a pleasant, relaxing time.

Thank you all for your action, support and generosity throughout the year. We look forward to your company in making our voice heard in 2014.

**Monday 2 December
12 noon**

**UAW Darebin Group end of year meeting
Peacock Hotel, opposite Northcote Town Hall
Allie: 9482 2930**

**Saturday 7 December
12 noon**

**Southern Branch UAW
BRUNCH FOR PEACE
Mordialloc Foreshore
See enclosed flyer invitation**

Tuesday 10 December

Human Rights Day

**Monday 9 December
10.30 – 12.30**

**UAW Organising Committee meeting
2nd floor meeting room Ross House**

**Thursday 12 December
10.30 – 12.30**

**UAW Book Group
2nd floor meeting room Ross House**

**Wednesday 22 January
12 noon**

**UAW Pub Lunch
Royal Oak Hotel
444 Nicholson St North Fitzroy
Tram 96 from Bourke St Stop 18**

**Thursday 23 January
10.00**

**Pioneer Women's Day: NCWV
Pioneer Women's Garden King's Domain
Melways 2G A10
Speaker: Prof Kim Rubenstein ANU
"Trailblazing Women and the Law"**

BRITAIN 2013: children of poor families are still left behind

By Anne Sgro

I recently had the good fortune to enjoy a short stay in London. It coincided with the release of a damning report on child poverty in the UK, **Greater Expectations**, by the National Children's Bureau, to mark the charity's 50th anniversary. It comes forty years after its seminal study **Born to Fail?** The report compares aspects of children's lives today to data collected then. It finds that significantly more children are growing up in relative poverty today, and that they will suffer "devastating consequences throughout their lives." (The Observer 25.8.2013).

- The number of children growing up in relative poverty – i.e. family income below 60% of the median after housing costs have been factored in – has increased by 1.5 million to 3.5 million.
- Children from a disadvantaged background are less likely to do well in education, despite greater access to early childhood education
- They will have less access to green space and play areas
- They are more likely to be obese than children growing up in affluent areas
- They are more likely to suffer accidental injuries at home.

The number of children in the UK – 13 million – has remained relatively unchanged since 1969. Yet the number of children living in relative poverty has increased from 2 to 3.5 million, or 1 in 4 children. They lag behind their more affluent peers in almost all areas of their lives, from health to education, early development to housing.

Levels of child poverty will rise in coming years. A recent Institute of Fiscal Studies analysis predicts that changes to the tax and benefit system will result in 600,000 more children living in poverty by 2015. The government disputes this figure, but does admit to 200,000.

The charity wants a Children and Young People's Board to develop new strategies to reduce inequality and a disclosure of how budgets would impact on child poverty. The report draws comparisons with other developed nations and claims that if the UK emulated the example of European countries deemed to be the best places to grow up in, the deaths of 172 children through unintentional injuries alone could be prevented every year, 320,000 more 15-19 year olds would be in education or training, and 45,000 fewer 11 year-olds would be obese.

The report points out that if the UK reduced its child poverty levels to that of **Denmark**, the best performing OECD country, almost 1 million children would be lifted out of poverty. If it were to match **Iceland** in the child health stakes, 27,000 fewer babies would be born underweight, improving their chances of being healthier in childhood and doing well at school.

If it were to follow the example of **Norway's** housing system, 770, 4000 fewer children under five would be living in poor environmental conditions.

But given the cuts to service and welfare benefits that are now taking place, children living in low-income families will experience even greater hardship in the future and the gap between them and others is set to grow even wider.

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VOTING AT AUSTRALIA HOUSE, LONDON 2013

by Carol Stals

When the election was called I realized that I would be in the UK. I take my responsibility of voting very seriously, so arranged to vote at Australia House. Initially I went down to Australia House to vote on the appointed day, to find signs up that the election date had been altered, as the new Prime Minister had placed his mark on it.

Fortunately I was in London again a bit later and was able to vote then. I set off to walk to Australia House in the lovely warm summer weather. I expected that voting opened at 10.00, so arrived at 9.30.

Crossing the road I noticed a flamboyant flurry of clothes draped over the barricades outside the building and an "old" woman sitting down there. On arriving I was delighted to see the wonderful Miriam Margolyes seated on a very low stool that she had brought with her, eating a pile of sandwiches and chatting to a man, also waiting to vote. This fella had to ask me who she was!

Miriam is a favourite of mine and I had seen her do her "*Dickens' Women*" at Frankston theatre, had heard her in conversation at the Liberal Synagogue in East Kew, and seen her in a MTC play, as well as her various radio and TV appearances.

Here she was, thrilled to be recognized and very happy to be placing her first vote as an Australian. She was first in the queue and held that position regally, becoming the Queen of the Queue. She greeted everybody as they arrived, asking which party they were voting for. The banter and fun continued.

Strangely the first 19 people in line were voting Labor, but the poor hapless couple that she good-naturedly challenged next reluctantly admitted to voting Liberal. She told them it was the Labor line and they had to go around the corner and up the street for the Liberal line. Grumbling away they began to depart. A young woman informed them that it was only in fun and we were all voting from one line. They were very cross. Miriam's reply, "Typical Liberals!"

She was enjoyed by everybody and entertained us all enormously with her wonderful repartee. She told me that she was currently performing in Oxford, doing a play about the author Barbara Pym, as it was her centenary year.

Miriam is a proud Australian and it was wonderful to spend 90 minutes with her before the doors opened at 11.00.

She will be appearing in a One Woman show at MTC in 2014. I did have my photo taken with her; She was incredibly generous, as everybody wanted a photo. She said she was just grateful to be asked.

We all knew that Labor stood little chance of winning but we had a marvelous time.

CHILD POVERTY: WHAT OF AUSTRALIA? by Anne Sgro

And what of Australia?

The situation in Australia is also damning. Cassandra Goldie, ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Services) said just before the federal election that 13 percent of Australians are living below the poverty line, **including nearly 600,000 children**. ACOSS says that there has been a 15 percent increase in child poverty in the past year, which is “deeply concerning”, and calls for better targeting of welfare payments. There can be no doubt that the Gillard Government’s appalling decision to place single parents on Newstart will ensure that children will be locked into a life of poverty with resultant poor health and lack of opportunity. State governments are expanding the prison system in readiness for more inmates as they also cut future pathways for young people. The Victorian Government has not only slashed TAFE courses, but is now planning to make it easier for principals to expel difficult students from school, without providing any support services or other possible strategies for them.

UNICEF’s Report Card 10: Measuring Child Poverty, May 2012, looks at child poverty and deprivation across the industrialized world, comparing and ranking countries’ performances. (unicef.org.au/Media/Media-Releases/May-2012/10-percent-of-Australian-children-living-in-poverty.aspx)

The Nordic countries and the Netherlands have the lowest rates of child poverty at around 7%. Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK between 10-15%: while more than 20% of children in Romania and the United States live in relative poverty. Only Denmark, Finland, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Cyprus are ranked in the top ten. Government policy has a huge importance on the state of children’s wellbeing. It is a deciding factor when comparing results in countries of similar economies.

A recent report (Age 10.10.13) indicates that Australia is among the worst countries in terms of rising inequality. The richest 10 percent of Australians have gained almost 50 percent of the growth in income over the past three decades, as inequality has widened throughout the Western world according to John Martin, who has just stepped down after 13 years as the OECD’s director for employment, labour and social affairs. He says that forthcoming OECD figures estimate that between 1980 and 2008, **22 percent of all the growth in Australia’s household income went to the richest 1 percent**. In the US, the **richest 1 percent gained almost half the growth in individual income over the same period, and the top 10 percent took more than 80 percent of the gains**. No prizes for guessing which countries had the most equitable distribution: Denmark and Sweden. Those Scandinavian countries certainly have more equitable societies.

The Greens are calling for support for a **National Anti-Poverty** strategy. They claim that Australia is now the world’s richest nation based on the median wealth of the average Australian adult. Yet 1 in 10 Australians live in poverty. The Greens ask us to personalise this – *“Imagine skipping meals, being unable to afford to pay your electricity bill, crashing on other people’s lounge room floor night after night.”* They are calling for a proper plan to deal with housing, inadequate income support, and inadequate health and mental health services. Meanwhile, Maurice Newman, new advisor to the PM, is calling for a reduction in Australian wages.

It is indeed a sad situation when a wealthy country cannot look after its most vulnerable people. At least in the UK there was discussion and outcry at child poverty. Here? Perhaps we are all too busy!

THE FORGOTTEN REBELS OF EUREKA Report by Anne Sgro

The story of the Eureka Stockade is one of Australia's foundation stories, but the women who were involved are rarely mentioned in the history books. We may recall the women who sewed the flag, Lola Montez and her troupe of dancers, and possibly a few shopkeepers. But women have largely been written out. Eureka has typically been presented as a story of male protagonists. Historian, writer and broadcaster Clare Wright aims to change that with her new book *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka*, because women were **not** written out at the time, and "50% of students are girls, and they have the right to know where they sit in the story." So she went back to the archives with a different set of questions, and tried to recreate the community and restore veracity to the event. What she found presents a very different picture of Ballarat at the time. I heard her speak recently at the Wheeler Centre for Books, Ideas and Writing.

Ballarat was very different from the Californian Goldfields, which were largely the domain of men. It was a community of 30,000 people living in tents. One third of the population was women and children. It was a young, vital, domestic community. The roads were unmade, food prices skyrocketed, there was poverty. There was a baby boom – between 1854 and 1855 hundreds of babies were born. The miners were husbands and fathers. It explains why the miners tax, essentially a poll tax, was so onerous and the method of collection so humiliating – men were supporting families. There was no access to land to provide a future. And many of those who migrated in the early 50s had expectations of independence and a future.

Clare Wright wanted to establish who the people in the Stockade were. And there were women – one died. There is a primary account of her funeral. Women and children were fired on in the Stockade – information that was suppressed. In Ballarat, women worked as shopkeepers, boarding house proprietors, entertainers. They were activists. They included mothers and wives. She asks how they could have been overlooked. Sarah Hanmer ran the Adelphi Theatre, a thriving place of socialization which became the headquarters of the American section of the population. She was the chief financial backer of the Defence List. Clara Seacamp, defacto wife of the editor of the Ballarat Times, became the first female editor of a major newspaper when he was imprisoned. Women were actively contributing to the press. Ellen Young, a Chartist, wrote letters and poems to the press. There were the women who sewed the flag, but Clare believes there were many more than three. These were just some that she mentioned.

Clare Wright gives a different picture of Ballarat and Eureka. She has made it a people's history, which happens, as she says, when you put women back in. In this history, she aims to give a wider picture of humanity.

Monuments are important, she says, because they are in stone, in places where people walk past or gather. There aren't very many monuments to women. So she is particularly pleased that the wording on a new plaque at the Museum of Australian Democracy in Ballarat states: "*to the men and women whose names we don't know...*"

So here is a book to borrow from the library or to buy for Christmas. I think that I'll have to have my own copy.

Joint Appeal to the Prime Minister about the use of the term 'illegal maritime arrivals'.

The UAW has joined with 120 other organisations to sign a letter to the Prime Minister. It was proposed by the Refugee Council of Australia, and is co-signed by a huge variety of organisations – church groups, multicultural organisations, human rights groups, civil liberties groups, doctors... the list is enormous. It says, in part:

While you may believe there is some political value in engaging in negative rhetoric about asylum seekers arriving without valid visas, the long-term implications of this approach must be considered very carefully. We cannot see how the Government's use of harsher rhetoric against people seeking asylum will assist Australia to remain a cohesive and diverse nation.

...While your Government continues to take a tougher line against asylum seekers, we note a shift in sentiment in Europe towards people fleeing by boat, illustrated by the decision of the Italian Government to declare a national day of mourning after the recent tragic loss of 366 lives at sea...Pope Francis..warned of a culture of comfort in which we become deaf to the cries of suffering and part of a "globalization of indifference'.

The Abbott Government continues to inflict cruelties on families, including separation and intimidation.

Reflections on the Refugee Rally, 18 November, Canberra.

UAW member **Amy Duncan** was one of 200 campaigners who took buses from Melbourne to attend the Rally. After travelling all Sunday night, they arrived in Canberra for breakfast. Amy was with the group that protested outside ASIO buildings.

Among the speakers was Bruce Haigh, a former Australian diplomat to South Africa during the Apartheid years and to Sri Lanka ...*He spoke about the terrible things that were happening in Sri Lanka and about the stupidity of giving them ships – and also the misinformation that the Government is putting out. There were a few refugees from this area and it was extremely sad to hear their stories. Then we all joined the big rally on the Lawn in front of Parliament, where there were many groups from all over Australia, with the largest coming from Victoria. Pamela Curr was the Chair – what a courageous person. There were many asylum seekers and refugees there and many of us went around talking with them – most were still waiting the outcome of visa applications. We chanted, we sang and above all the main message that was sent to the PM was that refugees and asylum seekers are **not ILLEGALS.***

Before Amy went in and had a cup of tea with her Federal MP she had to strip off her Labor for Refugees t-shirt. *There were no Labor Members on the Lawn. Greens Leader Christine Milne, Adam Bandt and Sarah Hanson Young were there. A banner that was put on the side of Parliament was soon ripped down. I was very impressed by the care, kindness and generosity shown to the asylum seekers. I was introduced to one of the organizers and she thanked us for our donation. I am so glad that I was able to be part of the rally.*

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE Melbourne Town Hall
10.11.2013 by Annette Madden

On Sunday 10th November, I was part of the sellout crowd of two and half thousand at Melbourne Town Hall joining the public tribute to Julia Gillard. There was an atmosphere of celebration and appreciation for this woman, Australia's first female Prime Minister. However, there was regret too, that her time in parliamentary public life was cut short.

Following the Welcome to Country from Graham Briggs on Didgeridoo, Leanne Miller and Dur-e-Dara, the 140 strong Women's Choir sang the *Love and Justice Women's Anthem*. A standing ovation introduced Mary Crooks, Executive Director Victorian Women's Trust. Mary spoke of the paid advertisement '*Credit where credit is due*', published in all mainstream newspapers on 5th July 2013, and now translated for publication in *Il Globo* and other foreign language newspapers. Five Victorian women paid \$20,000 each to publish the ad. Feedback was overwhelming, with forty percent from men! Donations flowed to VWT, and translation into other languages was made possible.

And now this event, which sold out in four hours to a crowd of mostly women over forty, but with more than a sprinkling of men and younger women.

Tony Windsor, introduced by Sarah Cooper, after another standing ovation, acknowledged Julia Gillard, describing how she 'stood out' in negotiations over the seventeen day period after the 2010 election. There is no doubt in his mind that he and Rob Oakeshott made the right decision. He told how Julia Gillard displayed dignity and courtesy to all, under great pressure at times.

He said that the last federal parliament was made difficult by "*Bully boy Abbott's approach, the Murdoch Press and others who set out to destroy the Parliament.*" Tony Windsor said the Gillard Government set the context for the next two decades with Education, Climate Change and the NBN. During a time when there was a concerted campaign to eradicate the Parliament; he has never seen a person so calm and dignified while being subjected to such abuse as was Julia Gillard. Finally, Tony Windsor appealed to the public to put pressure on the Liberal Government regarding the National Broadband Network. Fibre to the Home will be essential for future Aged Care, Education, Business and particularly for all people living in the Regions. He finished by saying "*The World is run by those who turn up!*" urging all to get involved.

Bronwyn Calcutt then sang her musical version of the Gillard Misogyny speech before Mary Crooks and Rob Hulls introduced Julia Gillard.

Mary Crooks told how there were nineteen legislative attempts before women were given the vote in Australia. "*No wonder that this extraordinary accomplishment (the first female Prime Minister) should be recognized by so many people wanting to pay tribute to her.*" Rob Hulls said that there are few good women or men who are prepared to go into public life to make a difference. Politics is not a free ride, but a bruising business. He told how this smart and articulate woman, Julia Gillard, upset the Shock Jocks by turning their world upside down.

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

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Throughout the afternoon there were reminders from various speakers of the abuse levelled at Julia Gillard. 'Ditch the witch!' and 'Destroying the joint!', of journalist Piers Akerman describing her as 'A piece of work' and more of the same from Alan Jones, Andrew Bolt and Janet Albrechtson.

When Julia Gillard rose to speak the audience again stood applauding for many minutes. In her address, Gillard outlined some of the achievements of her Government. She spoke of the Flood Insurance change, 83% of premises are now covered for flood insurance, compared to 3% in the past. The 43rd Parliament included women in historically large numbers. She despairs that these numbers have gone backwards in the new Government. Adding insult to injury is the statement that quality and merit prevail. If there are not 50% of women on any board, then women of merit are excluded. Gillard states that we should aim for a point where if a woman is Prime Minister or a Cabinet Minister or takes any high office, there should be no comment at all.

Other achievements included: education reform, strong economy with triple A rating, highest ever women's participation in the workplace, Royal Commission into sex abuse in institutional settings, record bulk billing in medical practice, eleven thousand more doctors, twenty six thousand more nurses and plain packaging for cigarettes. On disability care, Gillard proudly said that the program started on July 1st, and that this cannot be undone. She acknowledged the extraordinary work of Jenny Macklin during her speech, commenting on work done in the background.

Julia Gillard listed her regrets too: She didn't tell the public the reasons for unseating Kevin Rudd. She allowed carbon pricing to be called a tax, and her government didn't get asylum seeker policy right. She added in advice to the coalition government that this problem can't be solved by sloganeering.

Gillard summed up her time as the first female prime minister and the events surrounding it by saying *"It doesn't explain everything, it doesn't explain nothing, it explains some things."* She added that there is deeply held stereotyping and misogyny in our community. During the final session, Lynne Haultain's Q and A, Gillard replied to the question *"Did your government lose its way?"* by saying that hers was a purposeful government, and that no one had adapted to the demographic environment of news and journalism and the gender issue.

The day closed with Mary Crooks encouraging all to move on from today and by giving notice to major political parties that respect is the Key! She said that there are many "Warrior women" here today, mentioning Cathy McGowan, newly elected federal member to the seat of Indi, and the president of the Richmond football club, Peggy O' Neal. Another first.

Other women warriors who could not be present were Joan Kirner and Kay Setches. And there was recognition for Janet Powell who died recently. Although this day marked such serious events in history, there were many opportunities to celebrate.

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ERICA GILCHRIST: ARTIST, OAM RECIPIENT, UAW
MEMBER Major Art Exhibition Selected Works 1951 - 1995
By Carol Stals

Erica McGilchrist, talented artist, environmentalist and feminist was born 10 February 1926. She lived in Mt Gambier as a child, and was encouraged to draw by her parents. She went to Teacher's College in Adelaide, where she had as a fellow student Keith Michell. They retained a friendship. Erica left just before completing her training and became very involved in contemporary dance. She always loved the cutting edge.

She studied art at Melbourne Technical College (RMIT) and exhibited regularly which included shows with contemporary Sydney Nolan etc. She taught art at Kew Mental hospital. This period was to have a profound impact on her. She received a scholarship to study art in Germany 1960-61, where she did post-graduate studies.

The 1970 feminist and art movements had such an impact that she cofounded the Women's Art Register and was their co-ordinator from 1978 to 1987. In 1992 she was awarded the OAM for her contributions to art.

Erica has always fought against the social prejudice against women artists, and their under representation in collections and art books.

She has been a hard working artist, struggling to maintain financial independence, yet she is widely recognized in many circles, including overseas collections. Patrick White was a collector of her works and left them to the NSW gallery.

Now ill and in hospital, her work is at last being recognized with this powerful Exhibition which fills the old cottage at Heide.

Erica is a friend of mine and I think I have her last work, drawn for me a couple of years ago, after I gave her some pencils made with paper not wood. I attended the opening of this exhibition and was very impressed to see the full scale of her work.

Members of the UAW are planning a visit to the exhibition in January, to show respect for a fellow member and talented woman. We will probably have lunch there.

As Heide is not easy to access, we are considering "car pooling". If you are interested in attending, please contact the office and leave your details. We will get back to you re dates and meeting/collection points.

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

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There was optimism for the future with Julia Gillard describing her excitement about a future with global education. There was more than one mention of a future TV drama from the book 'The Stalking of Julia Gillard' by Kerry-Anne Walsh, to star Rachel Griffiths as Julia Gillard.

All told, it was an opportunity to show respect for Julia Gillard and the minority government she led; a government that achieved much, but which was overshadowed by internal strife and constant negativity from the Opposition.

Funding the ABC

Morag Loh has provided a sample letter members can send to their MP.

Before the Federal elections Mr Abbott declared that he would not cut funding to the ABC. I am writing to ask him to honour that declaration. I am one of the 80% of Australians who, polling shows, believes the ABC is the most reliable and fair provider of news in the country. For this reason alone the ABC deserves to keep its present level of funding.

In addition the ABC through its radio, TV and online services presents an immense range of programs - current affairs, documentaries on diverse subjects including sciences , arts, business, employment options and sports, together with comedies, biographies, travel and story telling – which cater for people of all ages and backgrounds, no matter where they live or what their interests are. The ABC informs, entertains and educates and presents Australians to the world and to themselves in all their variety. It is one of our most important institutions. We need it to remain adequately funded.

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