

Union of Australian Women Newsletter



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June 2013

WHAT'S ON- JUNE

Monday 3 June
12 noon

UAW Darebin Group meeting
Northcote Town Hall meeting room

Thursday 13 June
10.30 to 12.30

UAW Book Group
2nd floor meeting room Ross House

Saturday 15 June
2.00pm

UAW Southern Branch meeting
Mordialloc Neighbourhood House
Main St Mordialloc
Amy: 9547 6167 Mairi: 9587 8757

Sunday 16 June
12 noon

World Refugee Day Rally 2013
End Mandatory Detention
Stop Deportations to Danger
Honour the Refugee Convention
Exhibition Buildings near Gertrude St
Trams 86 or 96

Monday 17 June
10.30 to 12.30

UAW Organising Committee meeting
2nd floor meeting room Ross House

**Saturday 22,
Sunday 23 June**

NIBS Big Red Book Fair
Trades Hall, 54 Victoria St Carlton
Donate unwanted books now; stock up on
new and secondhand bargains at the Fair

JULY 17 DIARY DATE

UAW Coffee with a Focus
10.30 to 12.30
Topic: Asylum Seekers
4th floor meeting room Ross House
Details July Newsletter.

Put the date in your diary now!

VICTORY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS

Europe has banned bee-killing pesticides

By Anne Sgro

Heather Welsh, our speaker for International Women's Day, made an enormous impact on me. Her fascinating presentation on the vital importance of bees to our survival (April Newsletter) has made me so much more aware about everything to do with bees.

So it was that I recently and gladly signed an online petition organised by Avaaz* to influence the European Union to ban the use of pesticides that weaken and confuse bees. Their considerable victory in early May was the result of a two-year campaign which included flooding relevant ministers with messages, organising media-grabbing protests with bee-keepers, funding opinion polls. It was one of the most intensive environmental campaigns of recent years.

- In January 2011, one million people signed a call to France to uphold its ban on deadly neonicotinoid pesticides.
- Avaaz and its allies have protested at the last three annual meetings of the giant chemical company Bayer. Bayer refused requests to suspend the use of neonicotinoids until further scientific reviews.
- In January the European Food Safety Agency found that three pesticides pose unacceptable risks to bees, and the lobbying was ramped up – petitions, Bernie the 6 metre bee appeared in Brussels, demonstrations. The Commission at EU headquarters proposed a two year ban.
- Britain and Germany stated that they wouldn't vote for a ban. It was claimed in Britain that outlawing the chemicals would result in a 650 mill pound rise in the annual cost of UK food production.
- Avaaz published opinion polls showing huge majorities of British and Germans favoured a ban. All 27 EU countries were deciding.
- In April, Avaaz teamed up with groups including Friends of the Earth, Environmental Justice Foundation and Pesticides Action Network to organise action outside the UK Parliament, joined by bee-keepers and bee-loving fashion designers.
- Bee-keepers in Germany launched their own Avaaz petition: 150,000 Germans signed in two days. Germany switched its vote.
- Pesticide companies did their advertising utmost to influence officials at the European Union, but to no avail.

The result? Over half the EU countries voted for the ban.

But the ban is only in place for two years pending further review. So there is a lot of work to be done across the world to ensure that sound science, not profit, guides farming and environmental policies. Big chemical companies will fight tooth and nail to maintain and expand their profits.

The campaign involved scientists, sympathetic officials, bee-keepers, campaign partners and ordinary people like you and me, mobilised online and in the streets. Organisations like GetUp, Avaaz and Change.org give people the chance to make a difference either by signing organised campaigns or, like the German bee-keepers, organising our own online petitions. They are a good tool for reaching out and making a difference.

And in Australia? Urban beekeepers have an online petition urging Bunnings to stop selling Yates-brand pesticides, one of which carries the warning it "will kill bees".

*Avaaz is a global campaign network. www.avaaz.org/en/contact

LIBERTY AND JUSTICE IN LIBERIA (www.libertyandjustice.com)

By Mairi Neil

In a world where we are bombarded with graphic news emphasising the most sensationalist stories, it can be difficult to hear or appreciate positive tales.

RMIT University encourages everyone to become a changemaker and make a difference. To learn about sustainable steps taken here and abroad to establish projects that make positive change, they host free lectures, forums and workshops to discuss social enterprises making a positive difference to community. To get on their email list go to www.rmit.edu.au/socialenterprise.

Recently, Chid Liberty from the Fairtrade group Liberty and Justice explained how he brought fair trade to Liberia by focusing on women who were excluded from the most successful areas of the economy. Chid acknowledged it was the women who stopped the wars devastating Liberia by pressuring all factions to sit down and discuss peace. He knew if he wanted to make a difference to his community and help Africa not only compete but thrive, a focus on women would have the most social impact.

When he met with the inspiring Nobel Peace Prize Liberian activists their message was unequivocal – they wanted jobs, they wanted to be literate as well as being healthy and safe. They had been let down by previous promises from government, aid organisations and business entrepreneurs.

After a compulsory two month training program including literacy training and financial literacy programs, women were thrilled to find the factory existed. The Sewing Project, an effective model for economically empowering women could be expanded. The tragedy of the recent Bangladeshi disaster avoided by having commitments from big brands and pre-production costs covered plus ensuring the positive social impact they envisaged was tied to the cost of capital when Chid pitched his scheme to investors. The timing right because from March 2011 China has no longer been the place to manufacture cheap goods. Business previously using Asia looked to Africa. The African Growth and Opportunity Act in 2000 supported by each incoming US president since, gives Africa an advantage, not only trade-wise but loaning money.

Liberty and Justice discovered they had to change perceptions of 'The African Way' – the commonly held belief it meant poor customer service, poor communication and lackadaisical time-keeping. They have built-in an ethos to make a positive social impact. By 2015 Africa's population will produce an amazing labour pool with 75% under 35 years old, so they're determined to get the methodology right. **The Sewing Project is 51% owned by Liberty and Justice and 49% owned by the workers.**

Each employee signs a commitment card: '*To come in on time and work harder to change my life and my family*'. Jemmah is a success story. A child bride forced to marry a man 40 years older, the war found Jemmah abandoned in an internal displacement camp after her husband fled with his other wives and Jemmah's children. Although illiterate she understood the sewing machine so well that Chid was told, 'we have got our General Manager but she can't read or write.' At the end of twelve months, a young woman who had arrived wearing mismatched flip-flops and ragged clothes married her first sewing instructor and financed her own wedding with a reception involving all her co-workers!

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LIBERTY AND JUSTICE IN LIBERIA

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This kind of transformation is not unusual. The women are so committed to advancing their community they turn up an hour earlier for work to dance, sing and pray over their machines. They are happy to have meaningful work and access to health and education; to be able to go home at the end of the day after working reasonable shifts!

The biggest obstacle to establishing African factories is getting access to fair financial loans. Liberty and Justice is the factory's bank and trading partner. Instead of a race to the bottom it's a race to the top. The Sewing Project has not only empowered the women but a whole community, an example of successful social innovation.

PS. Liberia has the first elected female head of state: President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

FEMINISM, GENDER EQUITY AND MISOGYNY

By Anne Sgro

A seeming wave of books about feminism has hit the bookshops. I've just read **Fifty Shades of Feminism** edited by Lisa Appignanesi, Rachel Holmes and Susie Orbach in which fifty women *'reflect on the shades that inspire them and what being a woman means to them and to those around them.'* They include poets, novelists, campaigners, cartoonists, theatre directors... And they all have something for the reader to think about. It is a Virago Press publication from Britain.

Closer to home Jane Caro has edited **Destroying the Joint: Why Women Have to Change the World**, - essays, analysis, memoir and fiction - and Anna Goldsworthy's Quarterly Essay **'On Women, Freedom and Misogyny'** lays bare the dilemma of being a woman today. Anne Summers new book is **'The Misogyny Factor'** in which she argues that women's equality is still far from won in Australia.

These publications are certainly timely. The attacks on Julia Gillard, detailed so well in Mary Crook's **'A Switch in Time'** and Gillard's stinging 'misogyny' speech in Parliament have brought many issues to the fore. The fact that the speech was given greater recognition and affirmation by overseas press is itself a comment on the Australian media and its inbuilt bias.

There are a number of websites that call out sexism, list examples, and initiate action. Destroy the Joint 'shines a spotlight on sexism and misogyny' but also brings to the forefront the success and achievements of women around the world. It stands for gender equality and civil discourse in Australia.

It is great to have this feast of ideas, and it might well inspire greater realization and action. Robyn Morgan: *'If I had to characterize one quality as the genius of feminist thought, culture and action, it would be the connectivity.* And Dorothy Parker: *The first thing I do in the morning is brush my teeth and sharpen my tongue.'*

I'm off to the library to order the books.

UAW VISIT TO MONA (Museum of Old and New Art)

by Carmen Green

On Tuesday 14th May, a group of 11 UAW women- led by our Vice-President, the indomitable Amy Duncan- assembled at Tullamarine airport at 7.40 a.m. prior to departing for our 3 day visit to Hobart.

We stayed at Somerset on the Pier which was a perfect location for our visit. There were views from all the "Executive Suites" of the boats on the River Derwent and the magnificent sunrises and sunsets. It was close to Salamanca Square, the Hobart CBD, the ferry to MONA and a number of good restaurants and cafes.

While the main purpose of our visit was to see MONA, we also all walked for miles around Hobart visiting the art gallery and museum, the maritime gallery, bookshops and admiring the architecture of the vast number of historic buildings. We did a city tour visiting many Hobart attractions including Battery Point, the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, the view from Mt Wellington and a highlight for many of us the Cascades Female Factory. The Cascades Female Factory (female factory is the historic name for women's prisons) is Australia's most significant site for female convicts. From 1788 to 1853, 25,000 women were transported to Australia. Approximately half came to Van Diemen's Land and many of the women and their children were imprisoned here. The problem of overcrowding was obvious from the arrival of the first group of women in 1828. The Cascades Female Factory Historic Site is now a world heritage site.

On Wednesday afternoon after a rather rushed lunch we boarded MONA's striking MONA ROMA -an expensive military style ferry- for the 30 minute trip to MONA. This was a very impressive way to catch your first glimpse of this amazing building situated on the edge of a cliff. The ferry docked and the young and fit got off and climbed the 99 steps up the cliff to MONA's entrance. Older visitors docked in another area and were taken up the top in a 5 seater golf buggy.

David Walsh is the controversial multi-millionaire gambler, art collector and owner of MONA. His museum cost an enormous \$174 million.

You enter the gallery from the ground floor level and go down 3 levels in the glass lift to the exhibitions and then walk around each floor and back up towards the entrance. I was gobsmacked by the architecture which in itself is a work of art. The lighting was fairly dim to help you to focus on the art on display and the spaces were usually so vast that it was easy to move around. We were each given iPhone information units with headphones to guide us around the museum. Some of us found these difficult to use at times but there were staff in every section to answer questions about the art, the building or the technology. The staff members were mainly university students studying fine arts, philosophy and psychology and were both knowledgeable and helpful. MONA must have been a huge stimulus for the Hobart/ Tasmanian economy providing much needed employment for young people.

My favourite art work was Sidney Nolan's massive "Snake" a must see for Australians. I also loved the creative words in water against the spectacular sandstone wall of the gallery. There were also some impressive Egyptian pieces. There was, of course, the much talked about confronting art aimed to shock and challenge our view as to what is art. We all agreed that the combination of art and architecture was a great way to spend an afternoon. It was wonderful to share these experiences with our UAW friends. We were all so grateful to Amy Duncan for organizing these very special and unforgettable 3 days in Hobart for interested UAW women.

HOME AT LAST Older Persons' Housing Information and Support Service

By Carmen Green

The speaker at the UAW's *Coffee with a Focus* held on Tuesday 21st May was Gemma White, a Community Education Worker, from Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG). The UAW has a long and close association with HAAG. For many years the UAW and HAAG have both occupied offices in Ross House. Molly Hadfield, a loved and admired member of the UAW, was also a founding member of HAAG and served on its management committee from its foundation to shortly before her death late last year. Jenny Stewart, a member of the UAW's Organising Committee, was previously a staff member at HAAG. The UAW and HAAG have worked together on campaigns to ensure that all older Australians have access to affordable, secure and safe housing.

Gemma was invited to speak to UAW members about Home at Last, a new service provided by HAAG, which is funded by the Victorian Government's Department of Human Services through the Homelessness Action Plan. Home at Last aims to reduce the incidence of homelessness in the community.

To help people to decide which housing option is best for them Home at Last has been set up to help older Victorians -on a low income with lower assets- with housing options, advice and support as they make decisions and fill out the necessary application forms. Gemma described the housing options that exist for older people living in insecure housing in Victoria in 2013. These include: **Public Housing** (affordable- 25% of income and security of tenure so best housing option); **Social Housing** (private not for profit companies manage many forms of housing for low to middle income Victorians) –rents (30% of income) are higher than public housing but much lower than private rental; **Government funded moveable units** (granny flats); and **Rooming Houses** of which there are 300 registered in Victoria. There are also a number of newly developed types of housing that are aimed at retirees such as **not for profit retirement villages, rental villages and residential parks**. There is also **private rental housing** –least satisfactory for older Australians yet 7% of older Victorians are in this situation -older people on the pension in private rental are paying as much as 70% of their income in rent and live in great insecurity as leases are often quite short. Rental housing is often not suitable for older people with mobility issues. The advice of Home at Last is to keep looking for more affordable and secure housing options and to get assistance if you get into rental arrears.

Home at Last also give advice on **shared housing and moving in with friends/family**. Seniors Rights Victoria has a check list of issues to consider when considering living with family or friends.

Home at Last also has advice for **home owners** as 80% of older Australians own their own homes. This percentage is likely to decline in the future given present high housing costs in Australia and the fact that many baby boomers are retiring while still paying off a mortgage. The great advantage of home ownership is security of tenure and affordability but Home at Last recommends that home owners still need to ask themselves the question whether their family home is suitable for their older years (e.g. mobility issues) and whether on a pension they can afford to maintain it. Gemma said that the Dept. of Human Services has a Home Renovation Scheme which assists pensioners with the cost of safety home modifications. There is also a mortgage relief scheme to help pensioners with mortgage payments.

At the conclusion of Gemma's talk there were many questions from the audience who obviously appreciated the overview of housing options for low income aged Victorians and the work done by HAAG.

If you think Home at Last can help you: Call 1300 765 178 or drop into their Housing Information Centre at 1st Floor, Ross House, 247-251 Flinders Lane, Melbourne. The Centre is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday to Friday

Email: haag@oldertenants.org.au www.oldertenants.org.au

NOTES FROM THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE 13 MAY

By Anne Sgro

Thanks to work done by Cath Morrison, the Newsletter is now available for up to three months on the UAW website and also by email to members who request it. Cath has also done a huge amount of work on the office computer with the happy result that it is now much faster and less frustrating to use.

The UAW was represented at the Melbourne May meeting of Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) but the report is not yet in.

After considerable consultation and discussion of the draft Morag Loh has completed the last, updating chapter to Left Wing Ladies which covers the years 1999 – 2012. Titled *Having a Voice; Making a Difference* it is a terrific read. Morag has done a great amount of work and we are grateful for her commitment and talent. We will now think about what photographs and other visuals to include.

We are taking steps to have a large cork-board in the office to display photos, leaflets and posters.

Carmen pointed out that the Victorian Women's Trust has established a useful Directory of women who are available as speakers on a range of topics. As an organisation, we are always on the look-out for interesting topics and speakers.

DISARMAMENT DOUBLE-SPEAK

From ICAN – International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons.

At a recent meeting of parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty in Geneva, the Australian government refused to sign on to an 80-nation statement declaring that any use of nuclear weapons would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences.

In mid-May, at Parliament House in Canberra, ICAN launched a booklet titled *Disarmament Double-Speak*, which exposes Australia's mixed record on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

It describes early attempts to acquire nuclear weapons, support for British testing on Australian soil, participation in US extended nuclear deterrence, resistance to a ban treaty and the inadequacy of safeguards for uranium exports.

As former prime minister Malcolm Fraser writes in the foreword, *"Australians should be profoundly concerned that our government is today doing more to increase the dangers of nuclear weapons being used than it is helping to ban them"* and Australia *"should use our position on the UN Security Council to help lead the push for negotiations on a treaty to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons."* *"Nuclear weapons can only jeopardise, not safeguard, one's security"*

The booklet can be downloaded from the ICAN website. Write to your federal MP.

UN World Refugee Day 20 June 2013

This is a day, states the UN, when the world takes time to recognize the resilience of forcibly displaced people throughout the world.

The focus for 2013 is the impact of conflict on families through the theme of “**1 Family Torn Apart by War is Too Many**”. It is a day that recognizes people who are forced to flee to find safety regain hope and rebuild their lives.

How are we faring in Australia? The policies of both major political parties contradict our commitment to the UN Convention. Over 90% of people who arrive by boat are recognized as genuine refugees. Yet when they arrive, they face increasingly harsh treatment. Amnesty states that there are over 1,000 children locked up. That is cruel, scandalous and criminal.

55 recognised refugees are held in indefinite detention. ASIO has reversed its ruling on a refugee Tamil widow and her small son. They were apparently a threat because of associations and actions of her husband. Guilt by association? Many UAW members have long memories of ASIO activities in the 50s and 60s. They were dubious then, and they are dubious now.

Let's support asylum seekers in whatever ways possible, and keep up pressure on the government and Opposition to act with humanity, decency and fulfill our obligations as a civil society.

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