

Union of Australian Women

Newsletter

WHAT'S ON - AUGUST 2014

Monday 4 August 12 noon	UAW Darebin Group Peacock Hotel, opposite Northcote Town Hall Clare: 9481 2704
Wednesday 6 August 7.30-9.00am	Hiroshima Day Vigil Steps of St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne
Sunday 10 August 2.00 – 6.00pm	Hiroshima and Nagasaki Peace Concert Bella Union, Trades Hall, Carlton
Monday 11 August 10.00 – 12.00noon	UAW Organising Committee meeting 2 nd floor meeting room Ross House
Thursday 14 August 10.30 – 12.30	UAW Book Group 2 nd floor meeting room Ross House
Saturday 16 August 2.00pm	UAW Southern Branch meeting Mordialloc Neighbourhood House
Thursday 21 August 11.00am – 2.00pm	UAW – Seniors Network 4 th floor, Meeting room 2 Ross House Mary Owen: 9598 0235

FOR YOUR SEPTEMBER DIARY

Wednesday 3 September 12 noon	UAW Pub Lunch Royal Oak Hotel 444 Nicholson St North Fitzroy Tram 96 Bourke St, Stop 18
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RSVP 9654 [7409](tel:96547409) /[office\(at\) uaw.org.au](mailto:office@uaw.org.au)

INEQUALITY INCREASING AND WORSE FOR WOMEN- By Cath Morrison

Several landmark reports, among them: "*Advance Australia Fair? What to do about growing inequality in Australia*", by the Australia Institute and *Australia 21*, have documented that inequality is growing in our society, and that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. Not quite what we expected to happen in the 21st century. The benefits of increased technological know-how and increased growth have not trickled down to reduce poverty nor have Governments acted sufficiently to redistribute obscene wealth. As Andrew Leigh (The Monthly, June 2014) points out: **...today, the three richest Australians have more wealth than the million poorest. Since the mid 1970s, real earnings for the top tenth have risen by 59%, while for the bottom tenth they have risen by just 15%.** These are staggering outcomes and they are driven by Government policies. They can only be reversed by Government policies.

Australians are not alone in concerns about inequality; comments at the 2014 World Economic Forum at Davos indicate the rising concern (based upon some possible self-interest) that the rich are getting too rich. **The richest 85 people on the globe – who between them could squeeze onto a single double-decker bus – control as much wealth as the poorest half of the global population put together (3.5 billion people).** OXFAM REPORT to the Davos Conference of the World Economic Forum 2014. As Christine Lagarde Managing Director International Monetary Fund 2014 notes: *Business and political leaders at the World Economic Forum should remember that in far too many countries the benefits of growth are being enjoyed by far too few people. This is not a recipe for stability and sustainability.*

In Australia, inequality has increased markedly from the 1970's when Australia was one of the most equal societies in the Western world. According to John Hewson (hardly a revolutionary) speaking when he launched the Advance Australia Fair? Report: *Our land of "the fair go" is disappearing... (the) wealthiest 20 per cent of households now account for 61 per cent of total household net worth, whereas the poorest 20 per cent account for just 1 per cent of the total. In recent decades, the income share of the top 1 per cent has doubled, and the wealth share of the top 0.001 percent has tripled, and the share of the one-millionth richest (the top 0.0001 per cent) has quintupled. Most disturbingly, defining the poverty line as 50 per cent of median income suggests that some 575,000 (one child in six) were living in poverty in 2010. Some 37 per cent of those living on government benefits were living in poverty, including 52 per cent on Newstart allowance, 45 per cent of those on a parenting benefit, 42 per cent of those on a disability support pension, but only 14 per cent of those on an aged pension.* When former leaders of the Liberal Party are speaking about inequality with concern we know there must be a very real problem!

The real issue is what is to be done to reduce the patent inequality in our society. The latest Federal Budget is certainly not the way to go about it. The Budget proposed a cut of some 12-15 per cent in the disposable income of key lower income groups, but less than 1 per cent for those on higher incomes (for only a limited period). Increasing revenue through taxation of those corporations and wealthy individuals who currently pay derisory amounts of tax is one way. Professor Joseph Stiglitz interviewed on the ABC's 7.30 Report certainly thinks this is both socially just and economically effective. Changing tax rules which benefit the rich disproportionately would also help. *Fifty per cent of capital gains in Australia are earned by the top two per cent of income earners. Why should people who earn income from selling an asset pay half the tax compared with those who earn the same income by hard work?* (John Daley, CEO, The Grattan Institute, speaking on ABC Radio National, April 13, 2014). Tax breaks such as these, including lower tax on contributions to super, increase the burden on the average taxpayer unfairly because they benefit the rich disproportionately. The super concessions cost about as much as the total cost of the aged pension.

It is well established that the gap between those with the highest incomes and those with the lowest is growing and that this disparity is the cause of economic and social problems. However, as Richard Dennis of the Australia Institute remarked in the Report: **But do we care? And should we care? For some, such as Gandhi, looking after the most vulnerable is an end in itself. To others, equity should be pursued as a**

means towards the end of greater economic growth. To most, it is simply nicer to live in a society in which people who fall on hard times don't fall so hard that they, or their children, may never rise again... Policies to reduce inequality are often dismissed by conservatives as 'class warfare' against the rich, but in recent decades successive governments have **introduced a wide range of taxation and other policies that have exacerbated the gap between the rich and the poor.**

WOMEN'S PAY INEQUITY

There is inequality across the whole society but it is felt most acutely by women. The issue of gender pay equity in Australia (and the rest of the world) follows the broad pattern of increasing equality overall.

Women's share of the overall wealth has fallen and a recent study by Oxfam: The G20 and Gender Equality has shown that: *Around the world, women are paid less than their male peers, are over-represented in part-time work and are discriminated against in the household, markets and institutions.* The relationship between women's paid and unpaid workloads – caring for children, looking after the elderly – is the most neglected systemic issue in economic policy-making, the report says.

In Australia, about 65 per cent of women work but they are over-represented in part-time and casual work, and women's wages are about 65 per cent of men's. {Australia is better than Italy at least where women's wages are only 52% of men's}. Policies such as Australia's sex discrimination regime – which forces workplaces to monitor and report on gender equality – have fostered more supportive workplaces for women, Oxfam found. But there is a large gap in the levels of retirement saving, with Australian women losing out because of more varied employment. This is not a "women's issue", points out Oxfam International head Winnie Byanyima, but rather "systemic issues that determine the wellbeing of everyone, in rich and poor countries alike". The report, published to coincide with a meeting of global business figures in Sydney this week in the lead-up to the G20 in Brisbane in November, calls on countries in the G20 to make gender participation central to any reforms.

CONCLUSION

Now is the time for a broader public policy debate in Australia which brings the views of those who **do** care to the forefront: which gives a voice to women and which fairly values their contribution to society. The policies of political parties must be tested as to their capacity to increase or reduce inequality broadly -and gender equity specifically - to bring about a fairer and better society. John Quiggin, Professor of Economics at the University of Queensland thinks that there is a sea change afoot which is reflected in the wide interest in Thomas Piketty's book Capital in the 21st Century. Quiggin says: *....it seems certain that issues of inequality and entrenched privilege, long ruled out of court as "class warfare," are back on the political agenda.*

We need to make sure that these issues remain on the agenda and that women's voices are heard loud and clear in this debate and that the impact on gender equity of any policy change is made apparent and must be unequivocally positive.

ABORTION: taking on those who want to wind back women's rights.**By****Anne Sgro**

There will be a campaign against the conference being organised in Melbourne by controversial US-based World Congress of Families, a pro-life group dedicated to preventing abortion and re-criminalising homosexuality. The conference is planned for late August. Not only will it be opened and closed by Federal Minister for Social Services Kevin Andrews, with participation from Eric Abetz and Cory Bernardi, but a welcome address will be given by Victoria's Attorney-General Robert Clarke. As former Victorian Minister for Women, Maxine Morand has stated (Age 17.7.14) "It is inappropriate that state and federal ministers are speaking at a conference that promotes harmful and unscientific views on abortion."

A group that meets regularly at Parliament House and that includes former Health Commissioner Beth Wilson, Greens MLC Colleen Hartland and former Liberty Victoria Vice-President Anne O'Rourke has decided to "take them on". A Pro-choice fundraiser is in the planning stage for early-mid October in Melbourne CBD, and a questionnaire is being sent to all politicians to ask them where they stand. One in three women have an abortion in their lifetime so it is a common feature of reproductive health.

As Anne O'Rourke points out, there is a march to the right to wind back abortion rights. At the federal level, DLP senator John Madigan wants to stop Medicare funding for sex-determined abortions – not an issue in Australia; in NSW, Fred Nile has introduced 'Zoe's Law' (see February 14 Newsletter) to recognize a foetus as a person, as is the case in some US states where those accused under Personhood Laws have been predominantly black and poor women; and the threat in Victoria to amend the Law Reform legislation concerning conscientious objection – currently in abeyance because of the Geoff Shaw saga.

Beth Wilson recently pointed out at a Wheeler Centre discussion on Conscientious Objection in regard to abortion and birth control (26.6.14) that everyone has a right to safe, effective health care and that we live in a morally pluralist society. She believes that Section 8 of the 2008 Law Reform Act is fair – the referral sections do not mean that medical practitioners are referring women for abortion, but to another medical practitioner. Doctors who refuse to do that are breaking the law. She said that there are numerous examples of harm being done to women because doctors have refused assistance and asks: "Is this conscience, medical negligence or manslaughter?" Likewise, pharmacists who refuse to provide the morning after pill are obligated to inform women where else they can access these items. This is often difficult in regional towns where there is only one pharmacist.

As Beth says: "Conscience belongs to all of us. It should be exercised responsibly, respectfully and without discrimination." Health service providers should not have to act against their conscience except to save lives, and there should be a register of conscientious objectors for doctors so that their position is clear to their patients. Beth also thinks that politicians should indicate their stand, so that we know who to vote for. As Anne O'Rourke says, conscience isn't just the domain of the religious. Secular conscience can come from reason and humanism.

Beth Wilson recommends Gideon Haigh's "The Racket", which documents the history of backyard abortions. She also referred to Jo Wainer's contention that the reason there is so much controversy about women's reproductive health is that it is about control. I for one am glad that these powerful men are being 'taken on'. We'll keep you informed.

IT'S TIME FOR SAME SEX MARRIAGE EQUALITY! by Carmen Green

There have been a number of media articles recently that have raised the issue of equality for gay and lesbian Australians. I was pleased to read that the High Court had confirmed that "marriage" in the Australian Constitution includes marriage between persons of the same sex. As a consequence of this decision, Tanya Plibersek, M.P., Deputy Opposition Leader hopes this year to introduce a private member's bill into parliament to legalise gay marriage. Getting even more publicity than these two important issues combined was Ian Thorpe's "coming out".

During a TV interview with Michael Parkinson, Thorpe admitted he was gay. He concluded this discussion with Parkinson by saying, 'Part of me didn't know if Australia wanted its champion to be gay.' For gay and lesbian Australians his comment is hardly surprising as there would be few same- sex Australians who haven't experience discrimination. Thorpe was only 16 when he started being cross examined by the media about his sexuality. Hardly surprising –given the degree of homophobia in the sporting world then and now- that he denied that he was gay.

It is now almost 30 years since my partner, Cath Morrison, and I started living together. I remember how astonished we were then to discover just how homophobic Australian society was and the many ways in which even Government legislation discriminated against same-sex couples. Discrimination existed in relation to so many important areas of life. To give just a few examples: superannuation, taxation, social security and health insurance. Happily in the last decade or so –with the exemption of marriage - discriminatory legislation has been amended to give gay and lesbians Australians the same rights as other Australians.

Marriage equality is therefore the last remaining piece of discriminatory legislation against same sex Australians. The same sex marriage ban reinforces homophobic ideas that gay and lesbian relationships are not equal to other relationships. While this discrimination remains, our federal law sends out the message to Australians that it's still okay to discriminate against gays and lesbians. The attitudes underpinning this legislation are based on what should be totally outdated homophobic prejudice. Yet a reminder that homophobia is not perpetuated just by bigots on the fringes of society was given by the forthcoming World Congress of Families event in Melbourne with its joint aims of decriminalizing both homosexuality and abortion. Powerful Liberal Party politicians are attending and supporting this event.

One of the main arguments used against same sex marriage is that marriage has always been between men and women. However similar arguments have always been made against any form of social change. Think of the opposition to interracial marriages in the US and South Africa, abortion and universally to the struggle for women's rights.

Internationally significant progress has been made in legalizing gay marriage. In the last decade or so, starting with the Netherlands in 2001 at least seventeen countries- including Canada, New Zealand & Britain- have now legalized same sex marriage and in another 8 countries legalization is imminent. In the US where it is up to the states to legalise gay marriage, almost half of the States in the USA have now legalized Same Sex marriage. These countries have shown that when the majority of the population support gay marriage politicians do finally legislate for marriage equality.

In Australia, public opinion polls overwhelmingly support gay marriage (latest shows 75% support). Given these polls it is not surprising that Tanya Plibersek is hopeful of introducing a private members' bill aimed at legalizing gay marriage later this year. She is hoping to find a Coalition MP to co-sponsor the bill and also plans to pressure Tony Abbott to allow Coalition MP's a conscience vote on the issue. Perhaps this year Australia will catch up with other civilized countries and pass this important human rights reform?

MORE GOVERNMENT ATTACKS ON THE VULNERABLE by Cath Morrison

DEMENTIA FUNDING CUTS

A little known Federal Government measure may have a profound impact upon dementia sufferers with behavioural problems who may be refused access to aged-care facilities because of it. The federal government has cut the \$110 million Dementia and Severe Behaviours Supplement which was paid to aged-care providers to cover the extra cost of providing care to this group of people. Other cuts such as the \$652 million subsidy for payroll tax for the aged-care sector have put increased pressure on the sector. Without this special funding, private providers may be less willing to take dementia patients with behaviour problems (a common result of dementia unfortunately)...where will they go then? (*Weekly Review July 9, 2014*).

THREATS TO CONCESSIONS FOR LOW INCOME EARNERS

Pensioner concessions on rates, electricity and water bills and car registration are made available by the State Government but are funded in partnership with the Federal government, which ceased funding its share in the recent Budget. Lily D'Ambrosio, Labor State MP has questioned what programs will be cut so that the State Government can make up the \$73 million shortfall, and how long will the State government continue to fund these concessions fully, after the election is over. The commitment is to fund them for the next 12 months...what then after that? Interestingly, VCOSS CEO Emma King has been quoted as saying that almost a third of eligible householders in Victoria don't claim the concessions. (*Melbourne Leader, June 16, 2014*). Certainly it is a nuisance to have to ring service providers every six months or so to re-confirm eligibility but there are quite good savings to be made. It is worth checking to see if you are eligible.

GP CO-PAYMENT WILL HAVE GREATER IMPACT THAN FIRST THOUGHT

A study by Sydney University found that the government's **proposed Medicare \$7 co-payment and increase in the pharmaceutical benefits scheme threshold** will send a bigger-than-anticipated price signal, [according to a study](#) by Sydney University general practice researchers. If both policies were introduced, the average annual extra cost to a patient, which increases with age, would be A\$36 for children up to \$122 for people 65 and older. An age pensioner couple with concession cards would pay an average \$140 in co-payments for GP visits and tests plus \$59 for medications – \$199 extra. (Michelle Grattan, *The Conversation*, June 27, 2014) According to medical newsletter *6 Minutes*, the introduction of a GP co-payment could see **average emergency department visits wait times** increase by between six minutes and almost three hours, as more patients opt for free emergency hospital care rather than paying to see their local general practitioner. If there were 4 extra patients an hour the wait would increase to 3 hours. No doubt if the queues get too long the State Governments will impose charges for emergency visits. These costs, as always, impact upon women and children the hardest.

This government is systematically and unfairly attacking the aged, the disabled, working lower income families and the unemployed and we need to expose these cuts and keep them in the public eye. Only the Senate stands between us and more cuts. We will keep you posted!

FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS: INVESTMENT RIGHTS OVER CITIZENS' RIGHTS

Report by Anne Sgro

Anne O'Rourke, immediate past Vice President of Liberty Victoria recently expressed her concerns to a meeting of UAW members and at the Melbourne Unitarian Church. The Australia-US Free Trade Agreement signed under the Howard Government is anything but free and very much favours the US. There will be no access into the American market for Australian sugar, for example, for 18 years, Australian quarantine laws have been pared back, the Buy Australian campaign was cancelled, and only Mark Latham's timely intervention and a looming election saved the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, which Americans deemed anti-competitive.

The Abbott Government has recently signed a FTA with South Korea and Japan which coincided with the collapse of Australia's car manufacturing industry. These agreements seem to be on the rise again and are being promoted as "getting things done" but without examining the economic and social effects. Those involving the US are quite unequal, one-sided in favour of America. We are dealing with the most powerful nation.

The State Investor Clauses include indirect expropriation and allow multinationals to sue governments if they inhibit their right to make a profit e.g. Germany is being sued because it is phasing out nuclear energy in favour of renewables. Power stations are not being expropriated but profits will be affected therefore there is the right to compensation. Most countries recognize the "right to food" – in America this is "aspirational", not a right. In Australia we see pharmaceuticals as a right; in America they are a product. Americans living near the border go to Canada for pharmaceuticals because they are so much more affordable.

Philip Morris, the US-based global tobacco company, has moved some investments to a subsidiary company in Hong Kong to challenge Australia's plain packaging laws, using an obscure Hong Kong-Australia investment treaty. Plain packaging laws have expropriated Philip Morris' ability to make profit by displaying its logos on the packaging.

The company is still persisting with the case even after a group of big tobacco companies failed to get compensation for the legislation through the Australian High Court. Philip Morris clearly believes that an international investment tribunal will give it a more favourable decision

Everything is defined as commercial, including health and education. Labour laws would also come under expropriation. Human rights laws, environmental laws, can all be undermined. Free Trade Agreements give corporations the power to reign in democracy. As governments become fearful of being sued they no longer legislate for people.

Over the next 10 years, Indonesia intends to get out of its agreements. Others, including France, Germany, India, South Africa and Brazil are also withdrawing the State Investor Clauses. Countries are locked in because they must pay compensation, so bi-lateral agreements are easier to break than multilateral agreements, as compensation involves only one other country.

Big corporations are, in effect, writing a global constitution that gives them rights over governments and citizens.

See Page 8 for resolution passed at the meeting.

Resolution on INVESTOR STATE DISPUTE SETTLEMENT CLAUSES IN FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS:

We the members of the Union of Australian Women are concerned at the inclusion of Investor States Dispute Settlement Clauses in Free Trade Agreements. We object to these clauses on the grounds that they are a constraint on the capacity of the Australian Government to implement reforms in relation to public health, environmental protection and other important areas of national importance.

We note that the Philip Morris Tobacco Company is currently using these provisions to sue the Australian Government over the plain packaging legislation. Even if the Government wins the case it is likely to cost millions of dollars in legal fees.

We are also concerned at the lack of openness and transparency in the negotiations of Investor State Clauses. We believe that all aspects of Free Trade Agreements must be open to public scrutiny and in our view should never include Investor State Dispute Settlement Clauses.

This resolution has been sent to the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Minister for Trade and the Shadow Minister and also to the National Council of Women Victoria, to which the UAW is affiliated.

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Ross House, 2nd Floor, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000

Ph. /Fax 9654 7409 Email: office[at]uaw.org.au Victoria Inc. A00021219R