

Union of Australian Women Newsletter



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February, 2014

WHAT'S ON *Welcome to 2014*

We welcome you all to the new year and hope that you have had some fun and relaxation over the holidays because 2014 is going to demand a great deal of energy: climate change, asylum seeker policy, human rights...so many issues demand our responses and ideas.

We will also be celebrating, starting with the launch of our updated history during International Women's Day. Included with the Newsletter is a list of meeting dates for 2014- keep it in a safe place, or better still, enter the dates in your diary.

Thanks to members who have promptly renewed membership. We value your support and look forward to campaigning together to make a difference

FEBRUARY

Monday 3 February
12 noon

UAW Darebin Group meeting
Northcote Town Hall meeting room

Monday 10 February
10 am to 12 noon
NB: Note earlier start time

UAW Organising Committee meeting
2nd Floor, meeting room, Ross House

Thursday 20 February

UAW –Seniors Network
An outing to Williamstown is planned.
For details, contact Mary Owen:
Tel: 9598 0235 or maryowen at tadaust.org.au

MARCH

Tuesday 18 March
10.30 am to 12.30 pm
UAW's IWD Celebration and LAUNCH of our updated history:
LEFT WING LADIES: the Union of Australian Women in Victoria 1950-2012.

Speaker: JUDY MADDIGAN
Former Speaker, Victorian legislative Assembly

ABORTION LAW- current issues of concern

By Cath Morrison

There has been considerable press coverage of potential challenges to abortion law of late and members may recall an article in an earlier Newsletter regarding the possible passage of legislation in NSW dubbed "Zoe's Law" in the context of the march towards foetal rights in the US. In essence this legislation gives legal status as a person to a foetus weighing more than 400 grams or of 20 weeks gestation or longer. It has now passed the lower house in NSW and will go before the Upper House in March this year and may well soon become law in NSW. For the first time, the law will recognise a crime of grievous bodily harm against an unborn child.

The NSW legislation resulted from the death (as a result of a car accident) of an 8 month old foetus of a NSW woman, Brodie Donegan, and her grief and determination that this dead unborn child should have status and rights in a court of law. Current laws define the loss of an unborn child loss as an "injury". Brodie Donegan believes Zoe's Law will help the legal system better find justice for the loss of pregnancy due to a criminal act. *"There needs to be consistency and recognition to acknowledge the significant loss other than just my injuries"*.

As quoted in a article by Daniela Miletic, *The Age*, Sunday January 19, 2014, a Victorian law academic at La Trobe University, Hannah Robert, whose unborn child was also killed as a result of a car accident, believes Zoe's Law was never about harm going unpunished.

"Both in NSW and Victoria, serious jail time is already possible for someone whose violent and or reckless act causes a foetal death. Rather, it is about changing the way the law defines that harm to acknowledge grieving families. So it's really about grief, and legislating around grief. How law functions is important, but we're not robots. And sometimes the way things are phrased is just as important to people as how the law functions."

Ms Robert is concerned that if a foetus is legally defined as a person as in Zoe's Law, the mother's consent for any resulting legal action could be irrelevant. She believes birth should remain the threshold for legal acknowledgement of a person. Hannah Robert argues: *"that while Zoe's Law is drafted to create exceptions for anything done to the foetus by the mother with her consent or by a medical professional, human rights claims will still be bought up on behalf of the foetus. If you look at other jurisdictions where foetal personhood laws have been introduced, such as Texas, Utah or Poland, what you see is that they not only help undermine the availability of safe abortion, but they also contribute to additional criminal charges for pregnant women, for example, for supplying drugs to their foetus via the umbilical cord."*

Women's groups also fear the bill, an amendment to the Crimes Act, could restrict women's access to late-term abortions and possibly criminalise them. Concerns regarding unintended consequences are shared by many including the NSW Bar Association and the Women's Electoral Lobby, whose Chair, Melanie Fernandez, sees the debate on Zoe's Law in a context of a broader attack by conservatives around the country to roll back women's reproductive rights. She believes moves to change abortion laws in Victoria will also undermine women's access to safe abortions.

In Victoria, there is a push by some to amend the current abortion law to remove the requirement that a medical practitioner who does not support abortion must refer a patient seeking an abortion to a practitioner who does. Although the Premier has publicly upheld the current legislation, the Independent MP with the balance of power in the Parliament, Geoff Shaw is not known for his pro-choice views.

These are worrying times for those who defend women's reproductive rights and we need to stay informed and active on this issue as an organisation and individually.

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CHANGES TO OUR EMAIL ADDRESS AND WEBSITE ADDRESS

by Cath Morrison

Late last year this “bombshell” announcement arrived from VICNET (a part of the State Library) which has provided all our email and website services, free of charge for many years.

“Over the last 12 months, the State Library of Victoria has undertaken a detailed review of our web hosting and email services. This is part of a broader process to re-align the SLV’s services with the broader strategy of the library. As a result, the decision has been made to close our community web hosting, DNS management and email services (mailboxes) effective from Friday, January 31, 2014.

We will begin decommissioning our hosting servers commencing Monday, January 6, 2014, and all hosting and email services will cease on Friday, January 31, 2014. Any services (websites, email addresses, DNS settings) that you have with us will stop working on this date. This means that you will need to select a new provider for your web hosting services and email”

As you can imagine this announcement has led to a great deal of stress and work for hundreds of not-for-profit community organisations including the UAW and has some cost implications for the future. I have had to register a new domain name for the UAW website as it will no longer be a Vicnet address and a new email address as well was needed.

As a result, the UAW website will be hosted by a different provider in 2014 and we will pay a relatively small fee for email and website hosting. This is an interim decision (we were offered a 20% discount through VICNET) and we will see how it works out before we make a longer term decision about the provider of choice. VICNET staff are helping me make this transition for which I am thankful.

We will have a new email address (office@uaw.com.au) and a new website address (uaw.org.au) but these will not be active until very late January or early February. VICNET will forward our mail from our old email address for a short time while members are being informed of the change.

At the time of writing the exact date of the changeover is not known. Members will be kept informed of developments.

There is a silver lining- both of these addresses are easier to remember than our old ones but all references to the old address need to be changed on the website and we will need to send out change of email address notices to as many contacts as we can so that our email is uninterrupted as little as possible.

I have been told that budget cuts are responsible and priorities have been changed as a result. We have written to the State Library on behalf of UAW members expressing our dismay and concern that VICNET does not have the funding to continue the wonderful service we have had from them. Even introducing a fee for service would have been preferable to the decision made to closing down services; however, we will continue to have a presence on the Web and maintain our communication by email with members into the future by alternative means.

UAW SOUTHERN BRANCH DECEMBER 2013 REPORT By Mairi Neil

On Saturday, December 7th we held our annual **Brunch for Peace at the Beach** and were blessed with pleasant weather - and fortunate to have a spot in the rotunda that shielded us from the cool sea breeze! Once again President Anne Sgro and Morag Loh travelled from the city to join us. Jenny Stewart, who has rarely missed the event sent her apologies. It was wonderful to see Sarah McQuarrie, after her recent bereavement, and Peggy Decker too, after her health trials and tribulations. And of course there was sadness as we remembered the absence of Molly and Dot, who will always be with us in spirit.

Amy thanked Cr Rosemary West for supporting us financially - her donations help pay the rent at Mordialloc Neighbourhood House and then welcomed State Labor MP Judith Grayland, member for Narre Warren South.

Judith opened her speech by mentioning a meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi AC of Burma (Myanmar), who gave a marvellous speech about the rule of law when she visited Australia recently. Aung San Suu Kyi has been at the forefront of the democratic movement in Burma. (She used the old colonial name and not the modern Myanmar and Judith surmised that because the country is currently beset with ethnic rivalries, many of which have origins in colonial times, it was a deliberate use of old language to emphasise her points.)

One of the attendees at the event, was a young woman from Monash University who asked how she could get more young women interested in politics and world affairs. Aung San Suu Kyi's answer, 'maybe we should put them under house arrest' drew laughter but her explanation resonated with many of the activists present - situations or political crises drive circumstances, and in many cases, like the more acute call to arms she experienced, leaves no choice but to act.

Julia Gillard's misogyny speech galvanised a lot of women but her treatment dispirited many more, especially young women who quite rightly ask, "Why put ourselves through all that angst?"

Judith is now Shadow parliamentary Secretary for Women, a new role and she referred to two reports that threw up some shocking statistics and trends. The first one was COAG's Gender Equity report: **Tracking equity: Comparing outcomes for women and girls across Australia** <http://www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/reports/gender-equity/tracking-equity-comparing-outcomes-women-and-girls-across-australia>

One of their key findings : Girls do well at school and more women are attaining higher qualifications. Women also live longer and healthier lives. However, women have lower starting salaries and pay, lower labour force participation, fewer opportunities for workplace leadership, and less superannuation to retire on. Domestic violence is a key reason women use homelessness services. Indigenous women, women from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and women with disability face particular challenges.

When John Brumby was preparing the COAG Report he used material from the 2009 Time for Action report, by KPMG that estimated violence against women and their children cost the Australian economy \$13.6 billion annually. This was expected to rise to \$15.6 billion by 2021. In 2013, KPMG announced the annual cost had already reached US\$14.7 billion. (<http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/white-ribbon-importance>)

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Judith said her electorate had the highest incidence of domestic violence in Victoria with 71 women dying this year! The cost to families, the health system and business astronomical - change must be made even if some people only come on board when they see it is a drag on the economy! At least the current Police Commissioner is getting men talking about it. People are stating loud and clear to stop blaming the victim - male violence is a male issue - they must stop their bad behaviour! Not blame circumstances, alcohol or anything else.

In the report there is a section on what do girls think about themselves. They say their biggest fear and challenge is discrimination and this is the first time it has been articulated. The fact the first female prime minister was chopped down translates as - if that is how they treat the PM what is our future? Now federally we have PM Tony Abbott, who has set himself up as the Minister for Women! Hopefully being in opposition will bring out the best in us and girls will join organisations and articulate their fears.

Judith summed up several issues women face: family violence a big one, but also getting back into the workforce and retraining once they start families. Mortgage stress is profound in working class and middle class Australia. There is no money to retrain to go back to work. Liberal governments have taken away subsidies and grants that worked. Labor had given access to \$1000 to enable women to do certificates at community centres where childcare was available. Judith will push for this to be reintroduced if Labor re-elected. It was a policy that worked.

Judith is a member of SWAN (Southern Women's Action Network) and their research shows women are still not being treated equally - their superannuation is less, they have less opportunity to salary sacrifice and take advantage of taxation perks.

The Women's Caucus of the Labor Party discusses many issues relevant to women including the need for Pregnancy Advice Council to be funded properly and all women should have equal access to reproductive health services.

A project dear to Judith's heart is to establish a State Women's Archive to bring together information and ephemera so the wonderful achievements and stories of women will not be forgotten and can be housed in the one place for future generations to know our history. A group, including Judy Madigan, are working to get a structure together and hope to launch the project during International Women's Day celebrations.

Currently, the Victorian Parliament is a shambles and dysfunctional because the Speaker Ken Smith doesn't give a damn, has no respect for parliament and got the job by threatening to force a by-election. When parliament is poorly run all MPs look bad. Now Geoff Shaw, MP Frankston, has Premier Napthine by the veritable ; 'short and curlies'. Napthine tries to accommodate this man, who called the Parliamentary Privileges Committee, sloths for not meeting when the deputy Chair's father died. He is also persecuting an 81 year old taxi driver through the courts, yet a host of criminal charges against himself have miraculously been withdrawn. However, it is his stance on the abortion issue that is the most worrying. He is a right wing evangelist, staunchly anti-abortion and wants the decriminalisation bill repealed. Unfortunately, this is a decisive issue and there are MPs in the Labor Party who may support his private member's bill if he chooses to introduce it.

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Judith considers Newspoll to be an accurate reflection of the mood of the electorate and said that recent polls have not been good for Napthine and the Liberals - who may be tempted to go down the path of stirring up a contentious issue like abortion.

There were several questions and interesting discussion following Judith's talk. The recent Monash University report about the link between the number of bottle shops and gambling venues a place has and incidences of domestic violence confirms earlier reports. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-03-14/bottleshop-sales-in-sights-of-nsw-police/4573174> When will we wisen up and actually do something? Why do venues get increased gaming machines and licences given to liquor sales outlets when there is already a proliferation?

Rosemary West urged everyone to get behind the movement to stop the East/West Link and support public transport. Anne Sgro asked Judith if the Labor Party would commit to NOT honouring the contracts.

Judith said Napthine sees the project as a game changer and will not back down regardless of protests. She said she would take our concerns and suggestions to Daniel Andrews, Leader of the Opposition. The meeting agreed it is not just an issue for those in the inner city - we must all get active if we want a more sustainable city.

We enjoyed a scrumptious lunch - the majority of food and drink supplied by Amy and looked forward to a break with our families to recuperate and recharge our batteries, ready to organise the battle for social justice all over again starting next February!

NOTES FROM THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE DECEMBER 2013

It was agreed that it is scandalous that women's reproductive health is once again proposed as a battering ram thanks to the Member for Frankston, Geoff Shaw, who holds the balance of power in the Victorian State Government. The UAW will write to the Premier, with copies to the Minister for Women's Affairs and to the Shadow Minister.

Jenny Stewart was thanked for her many years on the Ross House Committee of Management. She has decided not to stand for this year but will continue to participate on sub-committees.

The Film Group has been removed from the 2014 Diary due to falling support. However, if members are interested in meeting at a more central city cinema, such as the Kino or ACMI, we will be happy to start up again. Please contact the office and let us know if you are interested.

CORRECTION.

Annette Madden has pointed out an error in her article **Credit Where Credit is Due**, December Newsletter, Page 7 in an email to the Newsletter: *I quoted Mary Crooks saying that it took 19 legislative attempts to get the vote for women in Australia. It was Victoria, of course.* Thanks, Annette – we didn't pick that up either.

WHAT'S TO BE DONE ABOUT INCREASING INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA?

By Carmen Green

I'm sure that most UAW members would have been appalled and angry at the news that the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce (VECCI) has taken action in the Supreme Court of Victoria to become a charitable institution. It has made this claim in order to avoid tax and to recoup payroll and land taxes it has already paid. It thinks that it is entitled to this because it acts in the "public interest".

As Professor Judith Bessant pointed out in her excellent article in the AGE (January 16, 2014) VECCI is Victoria's peak business advocacy group which lobbies for some of Australia's wealthiest business people and has access to millions of dollars in assets. She queries VECCI's claims to work in the public interest when in its role as a lobby group for business it has: *"advocated for more deregulation, increased privatization and what is called "workplace flexibility. One consequence of all this successful advocacy and not just by VECCI, has been an increasingly precarious labour market characterized by casual, insecure and low paid jobs"*.

Bessant continues: *"As a result income equality has become a dominant feature of a society whose governments once practiced a rough equalitarianism around the sharing of resources. Of late we have seen an unprecedented concentration of income and wealth in the hands of a few. The gap between rich and poor is at an all time high. More people, and particularly children and young people live in poverty."*

As Bessant also points out VECCI'S advocacy for "tax reform" has contributed to Australia's low tax rate. We are now the 5th lowest taxing country among the 34 OECD countries with constant political emphasis on cutting government expenditure. No wonder our education system, national infrastructure and public hospitals are so underfunded.

Bessant's article reminded me of a book I read last year by Andrew Leigh "**Battler's and Billionaires: The story of inequality in Australia**". I don't think most Australians have any idea just how unequal Australia has become. When I read that in Australia today, in terms of wealth, the bottom 20% of people have 1% of assets while the top 20% have 62% of assets it really made me stop and consider how much inequality in Australia has increased in my lifetime. Leigh's book makes the reader think about the reasons why this is so and also how this trend can be reversed.

With a Coalition Government now in power federally it is hard to be optimistic that action will be taken to decrease inequality. In reality, it is more likely that we will see an increase. According to Geraldine Kearney from the ACTU (AGE 19th January) "the Abbott Government is outsourcing leadership to big business in the form of a large number of reviews." The most important of these reviews is the review of Government expenditure called "The Commission of Audit". Who does Abbott appoint to oversee this review? Tony Shepherd from the Business Council of Australia! Ideas already canvassed include the \$6 co-payment for doctor visits. Given Shepherd's background it is not likely that the Commission will recommend policies which the UAW would support.

UAW members will wait with interest and some trepidation to see whether VECCI is successful in its outrageous claim to be a charity and also the results and implications of the 40 plus reviews being undertaken by the Federal government. The struggle for a fair go for all Australians is certainly not getting easier.

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CORRESPONDENCE**Excerpts from an email from Carol Stals**

Hello Anne and Cath. Another terrific issue – well done. Anne, your article about poverty in children in the UK (December Newsletter): I was there and caught up on some of it.

On Sunday I saw the Ken Loach film, Spirit of 45. The speaker talked about the post-war Attlee Government and how well respected it was. He talked about being suspicious of Golden Ages and I had only recently been thinking about that, as I had got to Teachers' College due to Whitlam's Early School Leavers' Scheme.

The film was good – a documentary that showed some brave and wonderful women. Poverty was aching real and nearly made me cry. A large part of the film was housing, and the dignity decent housing gave to people. It ended with Thatcher – which received a good hissing from the Labor mob as it was a Martin Foley fundraiser. Now we saw the privatization, and the film crossed to mine owners and magnates going off from their palaces on hunts. So then we had the decline of the working class, solidarity and union power and the rise of general poverty – which has never really gone away. The introduction of the National Health Scheme was interesting; some of the older women involved told very moving stories. The film was far too long but an amazing experience.

I heard a radio program on the weekend about the gentrification of Brixton, with art galleries opening, etc. Where do the poor go, then? I was very aware of the affluence on display in London, yet when I went to Hackney I could see both the gentrification and post-war public housing. Most of Hackney is being gentrified too. The march of the middle class.

Now I see my son and his family of three kids unable to buy a house and locked in the rental market and outer suburbs, with long transport times and high costs. Owning your own home was the Aussie expectation post-war. How things have changed in our lifetime.

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