

# Union of Australian Women



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

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## Newsletter

### **WHAT'S ON**

**Monday 5 May**  
12 noon

**UAW Darebin Group**  
Northcote Town Hall meeting room

**Thursday 8 May**  
10.30 – 12.30

**UAW Book Group**  
2<sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room Ross House

**Monday 12 May**  
10.00 – 12.00

**UAW Organising Committee meeting**  
2<sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room Ross House

**Thursday 15 May**  
11.00 – 2.00

**UAW-Seniors Network**  
**Celebrating Irena Higgins' 100<sup>th</sup> birthday!**  
4<sup>th</sup> floor meeting room 2, Ross House

**Wednesday 28 May**  
12 noon

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

### **JUNE**

**Wednesday 4 June**  
100 – 12 noon

**Hearing Women's Voices**  
**Celebrating the centenary of women's**  
**right to nominate in Victorian Local**  
**Government elections**  
[www.grlc.vic.gov.au/events](http://www.grlc.vic.gov.au/events) or **5272 6010**

**Saturday 21 June**  
2.00

**UAW Southern Branch meeting**  
**Mordialloc Neighbourhood House**

## OLDER PEOPLE A BURDEN? I DON'T THINK SO...NOR DO I THINK AGE PENSIONS ARE IN CRISIS OR DRIVING OUR COUNTRY INTO BANKRUPTCY!

By Cath Morrison

It's all a beat-up- overblown hyperbole by this current Government- and guaranteed to set one generation against another and to create the illusion of a "CRISIS" when there is no such thing. Certainly we have crises in domestic violence, housing affordability, youth unemployment, but none of these will be solved by attacking the pension although it is an easy target...easier than taking away some of the enormous concessions which go to business in this country, and much, much, easier than biting the bullet and increasing income through taxation. What about getting some money from large corporations based overseas like Apple who pay derisory amounts under our current laws?

Yes, our age pension spend is currently the highest item of Government expenditure at \$39 billion, but Defence is the 2nd highest and that is growing faster than the age pension so will soon overtake it...amazing that Defence spending never seems to be a burden but an investment. (The Stealth fighter jets which seem to be problematic will cost \$12.5 billion - are they a good investment?) As Russell Marks, writing in PoliticsOz (24/4) notes: [*Hockey's*] list of '[Large and Fast Growing Programmes](#)' singled out the aged pension (1st), aged care (8th) and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (10th) as increasing faster than the economy is growing. But he didn't mention defence spending, which is 2nd on that list and which is also increasing faster than GDP growth.

What about **super concessions**? The Commission of Audit was not charged with examining Australia's extraordinary system of tax concessions to its wealthiest residents, the highest among developed nations relative to GDP. Why is this particular sacred cow so staunchly defended? Possibly it is because super is a big earner for some of the biggest corporates in town? Superannuation tax concessions, currently \$35 billion, are growing even faster than the aged pension. The Australia Institute has even gone so far as to say if the Government abolished super concessions an increased pension could be paid to everyone and still save \$13 billion (*R. Denniss, The Case for a Universal Pension, April 2014*). Plenty of room then to trim a bit without attacking the current age pension!

Australia's debt is quite moderate compared with most OECD/Western countries...we have a triple AAA rating for good reason. Emily Millane, a research fellow at the Per Capita Think Tank says: *It remains the fact that Australia is one of the wealthiest developed countries and its share of age pension spending is comparatively low. Australia's [age-related spending in 2013-2014](#) is estimated to be 2.6 per cent of GDP, against an average spend among developed economies of 3.9 per cent. The idea that we have a budget crisis at the behest of welfare spending, primarily on the age pension, is bogus.*

This idea that the ageing population will be so sickly and needy that there will be insufficient taxpayer dollars to pay for us, is as Patricia Edgar says, "poppycock". In a fabulous article (The Age, 28/2) she says that: ***old age is a natural and inevitable stage of life with its own particular needs as does childhood and adolescence...and needs which government has to meet as part of our social contract...aged care services no more a burden than childcare. The facts are that we are healthier than ever before, we have paid our health insurance over the years, we have been active contributors to society and we will cost society less than previous generations if we are helped to look after ourselves.***

Older people are enormously productive in our society...think of all those unpaid hours of care of grandchildren, care of very aged parents, volunteering (which keeps most not-for-profits going): most of this work is done by those of us on the "wrong" side of 65. Australia's productivity will grow in the future aided by migration and population growth. We are being painted a bleak and misleading picture while we are being softened up for major hits to entitlements for the elderly, those with a disability and the unemployed. Given that for the majority of people, working past 60 or 65 is not really an option (where are the jobs?) a shrinking pension or being forced on to unemployment benefits until aged 70 is a daunting prospect in this wealthy country; it is the thin end of the wedge, and we should fight it with all the means at our disposal.

**SOUTHERN BRANCH MEETING: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE****by Mairi Neil**

On Saturday, April 12th, with many of our regulars ill, a small dedicated group of members gathered to hear Jennifer O'Donnell-Pirisi the VTHC Women's Officer speak on the topic of Domestic Violence. Jen is a member of UAW and has been in her role at Trades Hall for six and a half years. Her passion and commitment to women evident as she talked, and although the topic is one we discuss regularly, Jen provided fresh and astounding information.

In 2008, Jen met with Victorian Minister Morand and several academics to discuss inserting a Family Violence Clause into industrial awards and agreements to enable affected workers to apply for paid leave when necessary. Federal Ministers Macklin and Shorten supported funding for academics and union representatives to gather information to enable this to happen.

We all think we know the statistics but they still shock. Jen revealed that 60 women a year are murdered because of domestic violence and 20 children a year are victims too. (Recently, the tragedy of Luke Batty again put domestic violence in the spotlight.) Victoria has the highest rate of domestic violence in Australia and even accounting for the fact more women are reporting the assaults, Jen believes it is an epidemic and we are not alone trying to deal with this issue. In Italy, a woman is murdered every 48 hours, and in some countries husbands have the right to beat, rape and even murder their wives.

Between February and July 2011, the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse (ADFVC) at the University of New South Wales conducted a national online domestic violence and the workplace survey. The survey on the impact of domestic violence at work was completed by over 3600 union members. A full copy of the report is available on the website: [www.dvandwork.unsw.edu.au](http://www.dvandwork.unsw.edu.au)

**Key findings were:**

- The majority of the respondents were women (81%), two-thirds were in full time employment and nearly two-thirds (64%) of the respondents were aged 45 and older.
- Nearly a third of respondents (30%) had personally experienced domestic violence.
- Nearly half those who had experienced domestic violence reported that the violence affected their capacity to get to work; the major reason was physical injury or restraint (67%), followed by hiding keys and failure to care for children.
- Nearly one in five (19%) who experienced domestic violence in the previous 12 months reported that the violence continued at the workplace
- The major form the domestic violence took in the workplace was abusive phone calls and emails (12%) and the partner physically coming to work (11%).
- The main reported impact was on work performance, with 16% reporting being distracted, tired or unwell, 10% needing to take time off, and 7% being late for work.
- 45% of respondents with recent experience of domestic violence discussed the violence with someone at work, primarily co-workers or friends rather than supervisors, HR staff or union representative.
- 48% of respondents who had experienced domestic violence did disclose the violence to a manager/supervisor, though only 10% found them helpful.
- For those who did not discuss the problem at work, the major reason given was 'privacy', followed by reasons of shame and fear of dismissal.
- Over one third of all respondents who had experienced domestic violence reported the violence to the police. 25% of all respondents who had experienced domestic violence had obtained a protection order, but less than half (41%) included their workplace in the order.
- Only 14% of those who had experienced domestic violence are still living in the relationship, and only 40% are still living in the family home. Below average numbers (54%) of the respondents who had experienced domestic violence were currently living in mortgaged homes; above average (32%) were living in rented properties.

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**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

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- All respondents thought that domestic violence can impact on the work lives of employees (100%) and a high percentage (78%) believed that workplace entitlements could reduce the impact of domestic violence in the workplace.

For those unfortunate to experience, or live with family violence the responses to the survey would not surprise; they'd recognise the extremes in workplace response:

*"My workplace swept the whole incident under the carpet - I felt totally unsupported."*

*"(Co-workers) were very supportive of me, and this included accompanying me to court, inviting me to stay at their homes, signing affidavits."*

Therefore the much overdue Family Violence Clause gained a 7 Star Rating and was endorsed by the ACTU Congress.

**ACTU Principles : 7 Star Rating System**

- Dedicated additional paid leave for employees
- Confidentiality of employee details must be assured and respected
- Workplace safety planning strategies to be developed
- Provide referral to appropriate DV support services
- Appropriate training for nominated contact persons
- Access to flexible workplace arrangements where appropriate
- Protection against adverse action or discrimination

The clause recognises the issue only, union representatives are clear during negotiations that experts must be involved. Leave must be certified and evidence based - doctors, police, counsellors. Effort must be made to work out safety plans for employees such as relocation, or varying start and finishing times. Flexible work times are important, especially in places where there is no obvious security or swipe card access. People working in large public places such as hospitals, libraries and schools particularly vulnerable. Statistically, women who are pregnant, especially during the final stage, are the most at risk.

By 2009, 1.3 million workers had the benefit of a Family Violence leave Clause in their workplace agreement. (It is called Family Violence in Victoria and Tasmania, other states call it Domestic Violence.) In 2010, Victoria became the first state to give paid leave (an employee of a council). The maximum anyone has taken off is a week, and on average the leave is half a day. It is not leave that will be abused, it must be certified.

The clause is world's best practice, quoted in New York by the UN, with Canadian, New Zealand and European unions lobbying for similar paid leave and using the Australian model and the survey findings as support. In Germany they have paid leave for rape and victims of sexual assault but Australia led the world seeking acknowledgement that domestic violence is not a private matter - women are murdered going to and from work.

Unions are still fighting to get the clause put into the Fair Work Act and we need to lobby politicians and hopefully get a better response than Jen received from Victorian Minister Wooldridge whose calendar is apparently busy for 18 months and whose advisor said the clause would be too costly for the public sector to implement!

Currently, it is the private sector and enterprise bargaining achieving success. Modern industrial relations and practice must reflect modern life. Domestic Violence is the biggest contributing factor to homelessness for women under 45. It is a myth that it is only one particular class or cultural group affected. If the clause is in the Fair Work Act it means women are protected. They need to feel safe at work and at home. Work protection is empowering and an incentive to stay employed. Family violence often leads to precarious employment and disruptive work history. This clause challenges employers and work colleagues to acknowledge harassment and stalking, to support women who disclose violence at home. They need support and many women say if they had been asked to disclose the true situation they would have - this clause allows work colleagues to be a witness and support for these women.

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**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

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We discussed the many contributing factors to family violence, agreeing the biggest factor is the need for perpetrators to have power and exercise excessive control. Women know the triggers: often alcohol and drugs but many men abuse even when they have not been drinking.

The members present signed a letter to Premier Napthine (copied to the Leader of the Opposition Daniel Andrews) asking for a commitment to improve and ensure support services for family violence victims, including secure housing, ongoing counselling and a preventative education program in schools.

Mairi has since forwarded the following link to a very coherent and chilling article doing the rounds on social media. It is written by Jill Meagher's husband after being in court and was posted on the White Ribbon Campaign website on 17 April 2014.

<http://whiteribbonblog.com/2014/04/17/the-danger-of-the-monster-myth/>

Tom Meagher is writing about The Danger of the Monster Myth, and writes in part: *One of the most dangerous things about the media saturation of this crime was that Bayley is in fact the archetypal monster. Bayley feeds into a commonly held social myth that most men who commit rape are like him, violent strangers who stalk their victims and strike at the opportune moment. It gives a disproportionate focus to the rarest of rapes, ignoring the catalogue of non-consensual sex happening on a daily basis everywhere on the planet. It validates a limitation of the freedom of women, by persisting with an obsession with a victim's movements rather than the vile actions of the perpetrator, while simultaneously creating a 'canary down the mine' scenario. Men may feel uncomfortable by a peer's behavior towards women, may absolve themselves from interfering with male group norms, or breaking ranks with the boys by normalizing that conduct in relation to 'the rapist'. In other words he can justify his friend's behavior by comparison – "he may be a ---, but he's not Adrian Bayley."*

*The monster myth allows us to see public infractions on women's sovereignty as minor, because the man committing the infraction is not a monster like Bayley.*

And he concludes: *Since Jill died, I wake up every day and read a quote by Maya Angelou – "history, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be un-lived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again."*

*Male self-examination requires this courage, and we cannot end the pattern of men's violence against women without consciously breaking our silence.*

Since the Southern Group meeting, there has been the vicious murder of a young woman and mother of four, Fiona Warzywoda by her partner on a busy Sunshine street, and the murder of two young girls by their father. While much of the media response has been to call for a tightening of police and judicial procedures, there have been powerful letters to the press. Scott Holmes wrote (Age letters 24.4.14) *Domestic violence statistics will not fall while we focus only on changing the behavior of individual men. It is the culture of distorted masculinity that needs to change – a culture that assumes male privilege and entitlement, that celebrates the heroism and necessity of violence, and objectifies and sexualizes women. This culture still dominates every sphere of society from politics to sport.* And author Tony Birch writes in the same issue, after detailing the violence that his mother and siblings suffered at the hands of his father: *Tomorrow we will remember "the fallen" of wars waged outside Australia. And yet we continue to kill women and children on the home soil. Lest we forget.*

## WRITE TO REFUGEES

***“Australia is fast building an international reputation for our treatment of asylum seekers, but sadly, not one we can be proud of.”*** GetUp.

Julian Burnside, AO QC, Australian barrister and human rights advocate, is working with GetUp to encourage people to write to asylum seekers, and asks: “Will you be part of my letter writing campaign and show some of the world’s most vulnerable people that we’re capable of compassion and empathy?” The campaign is aimed at refugees held offshore in Manus and Nauru.

He will distribute the letters along with more paper and the self-addressed envelopes from Australian letter-writers.

He will provide a covering letter and ask detainees to provide the names of others in the camp who may appreciate correspondence.

**First steps:** write a letter but not directed to a specific person

Say who you are, so the recipient will not wonder whether you are acting for the government and tell them something about yourself. Let them know that not all Australians are hostile to them. Be sensitive to their circumstances. Encourage them to write back to you.

**Send the letter to: Julian Burnside QC 205 William St Melbourne 3000.**

Enclose a self-addressed envelope. When you get a reply just keep writing to that person. If you want you can ask if there are others who would appreciate a letter. Spread the word to friends who would like to join the campaign.

Are Australian attitudes changing? In February GetUp members organised candle-lit vigils for those who have suffered under Australia’s policies. The Palm Sunday Rallies were huge in their turn-out of people showing support for the humane treatment of refugees; the major churches have made statements opposing the government’s policies; there are banners hanging from St Paul’s Cathedral in Melbourne, and church leaders have protested asylum seeker policy in St Kilda with an Easter crucifix installation. Each crucifix, sculpted from barbed wire in the shape of a man, a woman and a child, bears the name of one of the government’s offshore detention centres.

The Reverend John Tansey of the St Kilda Uniting Church Parish officially opened the protest together with Sister Brigid Arthur of the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project, and with the support of Father Bob Maguire. The March issue of the Unitarian Church’s Beacon is devoted totally to asylum seekers, and contains an excellent article by Julian Burnside outlining the current costs and proposing an alternative that would benefit refugees, country and regional towns, would be humane, save huge amounts of money and leave plenty over for public housing, building schools and hospitals and other infrastructure projects.

But we have a long way to go yet. The arrogance of Immigration Minister Scott Morrison in the face of concerns and criticisms from the UN takes one’s breath away. We’ve got to get the message out, ensure that we are not just preaching to the converted, and target Government and Opposition. Get writing!

**FEMINISM, MISOGYNY AND THE ARAB WORLD** By Anne Sgro

I recently had the good fortune to hear “extremist, liberal. Feminist” (her words) award-winning Egyptian Journalist Mona Eltahawy speak at the Wheeler Centre. The topic was “Egypt, the Arab World, and the War on Women”, though she thought Middle East/North Africa was a better description than Arab. She was an amazing woman – outspoken, funny, committed to the revolution. She lives in Cairo, where she has launched a support group for women. She says that she is happy to work by herself, that she is “outside on the edge.’

It is not easy to be in Egypt right now because it is stuck between military fascism and Islamic fascism. It takes time to dismantle years of military rule, the military is in panic and feels that it has to silence its critics by imprisoning so many and by jailing journalists. We in the West have been presented with stereotypes of Egyptians, who seemingly don’t understand democracy. Yet many took part in the revolution, many believe in it, including young women. She believes that it will take 5 – 7 years for change to take place. They don’t have a presidential candidate yet, for example.

But there is a woman, a feminist, leading a political party and while there is a push to take women out of the public world back into the private there is also a long culture of feminism in these countries. For the political revolution to succeed there must also be a social and sexual revolution. She has worked with the BBC to make a documentary of women in the revolution in Egypt, Jordan, Libya and Tunisia. And there will be differences: she was radical in removing the headscarf, while a feminist in Tunisia was radical in donning it. In regard to the differences between secular and islamist women she commented: “When we fight only men benefit.”

She noted that in Egypt 30% of families are led by women because the men are not there. Linked with the crucial issue of the economy is the question of safety. The streets are not safe and this impacts on women’s ability to work. There is desperate poverty and people’s votes are often bought with food.

She likened the attacks on protesters in Cairo to Dante’s *Inferno* and spoke of snipers on rooftops who targeted protesters’ eyes. Outside Cairo, there are protests in Alexandria but the revolution has not reached many small towns. She spoke at some length of the violence against her when she joined a protest. She was beaten by five men, sexually assaulted, accused of being a spy, detained and interrogated for 12 hours. She subsequently wrote a piece “*Why do they hate us?*” and asked how different Arab men are from others. She concluded that misogyny has not disappeared anywhere, but the marriage of religion and culture has meant that Arab countries are at the bottom of the list in relation to gender. However, she did point out that Tunisia has a constitution that enshrines equality, the first in the Arab world.

In answer to a question from a young woman as to how she could help, she said that, if she planned to go to Egypt she could be an intern for a women’s group, but gently pointed out that misogyny is on a continuum, noting that Australians have a man who is the Minister for Women. She urged women to “fight the fight everywhere” and suggested that we focus on our “own right wing lunatics.”

For those like me with little understanding of Egypt, it was a most informative discussion.

**MYTH BUSTERS: some asylum seeker myths and facts from the March issue of The Beacon**

**Myth:** Boat people are economic migrants choosing Australia for a better life.

**Fact:** Over 90% of asylum seekers who arrive by boat are found to be refugees.

**Myth:** Asylum seekers are ‘country shoppers’: they could have stopped at other places along the way.

**Fact:** Country shoppers? Malaysia and Indonesia are not signatories to the Refugee Convention. Asylum seekers are illegal there so they can’t stop.

**Myth:** They destroy their documentation to cheat the system.

**Fact:** Destroying documents has no benefit to asylum seekers. They often flee quickly and aren’t able to get all the necessary documentation before leaving.

**Myth:** Charity begins at home; let’s help our poor and homeless first.

**Fact:** Australia spends billions on mandatory detention and offshore processing. Placing people in the community would cost a fraction of that.

**Myth:** Asylum seekers want to destroy our way of life and bring fundamentalism to Australia.

**Fact:** Australia has a rich and multicultural history making us a better nation – asylum seekers and refugees have helped us with this.

**Myth:** We already do our share. Australia is one of the most generous nations in the world with refugees.

**Fact:** 80% of refugees are in developing countries. In 2012, Australia ranked 49<sup>th</sup> for number of refugees hosted, way behind Germany, the UK and the US.

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