

Union of Australian Women

Newsletter

December 2014 - WHAT'S ON

Best wishes to all members and friends for the festive season. It has been a 'full on' year on many counts, and we hope that you will have a pleasant and relaxing time over the holiday break.

Thank you all for your action and support throughout the year and we look forward to campaigning together in 2015.

DECEMBER 2014

Saturday 6 December
12 noon

**UAW Southern Branch
BRUNCH for PEACE at the BEACH
Mordialloc Foreshore
(See attached flyer invitation)**

Monday 8 December
10.00 – 12 noon

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

Monday 8 December
12 noon

**UAW Darebin Group end of year meeting
Peacock Hotel, opposite Northcote Town Hall
Clare: 9481 2704**

Wednesday 10 December

HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

JANUARY 2015

Wednesday 21 January
12 noon

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

REMEMBERING DECEMBER 2, 1972: A NEW DAWN FOR THE WOMEN OF AUSTRALIA

by Cath Morrison

Edward Gough Whitlam (1916-2014) changed women's lives in the too short 3 year period he was Prime Minister. The period prior to when he came to office was one of immense social upheaval and there were many external forces for change in our society, including the women's liberation movement and in Australia the enormous influence of the Women's Electoral Lobby. Nevertheless, once elected as PM Whitlam committed to action, and in 1972 he set in train breathtaking (at the time) reforms which gave women the opportunity to get out of the kitchen and stop making the tea. His government transformed the landscape for women. In education, in health, in the workplace and in social policy, Whitlam's legacy for women should be celebrated.

Whitlam took women seriously as equals, in no small part due to the influence of his formidable mother and also that of his partner for 70 years, Margaret Dovey. *Gough Whitlam was the first Prime Minister to make it clear to young women that they could be, and do, anything, proclaiming, 'your biology should not be a barrier'.* (Claire Moore, Womens Agenda, 23/10)

Education

Free University education! How fantastic was that for Australian women? How many of us were able to get a degree because of this reform or to return to mature age study in various subsidised training schemes such as the NEAT Scheme. I know so many women whose lives took on an entirely different path thanks to these opportunities.

Equal Pay and Maternity Leave

The successful 1972 Equal Pay case which was supported by Whitlam's Government meant that Australian women undertaking similar work to men should be paid an equal wage. Half a million female workers became eligible for full pay, and an overall rise in women's wages of around 30% resulted from this case. On June 18, 1973, the Whitlam Government passed the *Maternity Leave (Australian Government Employees) Act 1973*. This legislation provided 52 weeks of leave for mothers (12 on full pay) and outlawed discrimination against Commonwealth employees because of pregnancy. This leave flowed on to other women workers and women were at last able to participate in work after motherhood if they wished. At the time this was pretty amazing stuff because in the public service before this legislation, you had to resign your job if you became pregnant. I had to leave my job-and no maternity leave either!

Women's health

Whitlam established the original Medicare/universal health care that this current government wants to make non-universal with its co-payment proposals!

The Whitlam Government also funded and supported grassroots organisations providing specialist health and welfare services for women. These included support for women's health centres, refuges and rape and crisis centres. These were revolutionary firsts at the time.

During its first week in power, the Whitlam Government made the contraceptive pill available through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, a revolutionary change which needs its own chapter.

Social policy

In 1973, the Whitlam Government introduced the single mothers benefit to provide financial assistance to supporting mothers and later extended to include all single parents. The previous high rate of forced adoptions became largely a thing of the past and now seems entirely and unnecessarily cruel- but many women had absolutely no way of supporting a child prior to this benefit

The Whitlam Government was the first in the world to appoint a dedicated adviser on Women's affairs to the head of government. Elizabeth Reid was given this position in April 1973. Her role was particularly important at a time when there were still no women in Labor's caucus. **Cont on p.8**

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE**Anne Sgro**

Annabel Crabb's recent book *The Wife Drought* discusses a simple fact that has a huge effect on the participation and advancement of women in the Australian workforce: men have wives or partners who mostly work part-time or not at all and take care of the home front; women do not! In Australian families with children under the age of 15, 60% have a father who works full-time and a mother who works part-time or not at all. Only 3% of families have mothers who work full-time and a father who is at home or works part-time.

Anne Manne reviews the book in the November *Monthly*. I heard the author speak recently at the Wheeler Centre. She has done significant research and makes interesting observations. 64% of university graduates are women; 45% of middle management are women; only 17.3% of CEOs. Why do women disappear? In Australia in the last half century not a great deal has changed since the marriage bar that prevented women from working in the Public Service after they married, a state of affairs then supported by the unions which were intent on protecting men's work. The big shift, under the galvanizing force of feminism, was from women being in the home to women doing part-time work. There has been little change on the male side of the ledger.

In Australia, having a child means a very different thing for men and women. You are seen to be more promotable, more reliable if you are a man with children. It is the exact opposite for a woman. Australians have a real attachment to the male bread-winner model.

There is a very high level of part-time employment for women. And in terms of housework, women overwhelmingly carry the burden. Crabb has some interesting statistics about how much women do depending also on how much they contribute to the family income. In America it is different: there is a higher degree of outsourced domestic labour and more women are in full time jobs. Thanks to feminism, says Crabb, we think a lot about women and work. But we don't really think much about what happens at home. Men's working lives are affected by economics: redundancy, unemployment. Women's working lives are affected by care of children, care of elders, etc.

While we hear a little about stay-at-home fathers, not much is really changing, and the pattern is overwhelmingly small. But workplace culture has meant that it is hard for men to change. A recent LaTrobe University analysis of more than 2600 fathers of four and five year old children found one in three experienced high 'work-family conflict' when father's work commitments are incompatible with their family responsibilities (Age 13.11.14). Departing Westpac CEO, Gail Kelly recently remarked that if women are to participate more fully in the workplace, the culture must change - and that now only 2% of top CEOs are women (ABC 7.30 Report 13.11). It would benefit both women and men. In Norway parental leave includes a period of paternity leave that is lost if fathers don't take it. Now, 90% of Norwegian fathers take at least some weeks of parental leave. The Norwegian government helped create this new norm by legislation. The country has a high participation of women in the workforce. There is also greater family support and emphasis on early childhood learning. As Andrew Scott asks in his recently launched study *Northern Lights: why aren't we learning from the Nordic countries?*

What happens in Australia? We have a basic parental leave scheme that does not encourage change. Workplaces have failed to make the necessary policy and cultural shifts to support more fathers to be involved in parenting and to encourage more women to participate in the workforce. The economy suffers as a result, women try to do an incredible balancing act, and men continue to be advantaged by having a 'wife'.

PASSING ON THE KNOWLEDGE

By Morag Loh

Earlier this year my younger grand-daughter and her friend, both in their first year of secondary school were 'googling' when they came across a notice for the National History Challenge. An initiative of the History Teachers Association of Australia, the annual Challenge encourages school students to explore and write about aspects of Australia's history. The girls knew about it – an older sister had won an award – and decided they would like to enter. Their teacher told them 'to go for it, but do it carefully.'

Last year, when they were still at primary school, I'd been invited to talk to their class about equal pay. Subsequently the whole year level completed a large project on women's struggle for equality. When the Challenge topic for 2014 was 'Changing perspectives....' they decided to build on their prior experience and investigate *Changing Perspectives of Women in the Workplace*. They chose to construct a website and present their information in the form of entries from diaries handed down within one family between 1901 and 2010.

1917 was an eventful year for the Callin family. Ethel Callin, aged 15, recorded that her older sister Helen, a junior teacher, outraged that she was paid so much less than her male colleagues, complained to the Victorian Lady Teachers Association, which took a case to the Public Service Commission. When the case was rejected Helen was very upset and reflected that society wanted women in the home, not in the paid workforce. Mrs Callin fared better. Mr Callin, who died in 1913, had stipulated in his will that a male relative should bring up the girls. However, thanks to the Marriage Act of 1912, Mrs Callin remained their guardian. Then, with male labour taken up in the war, Ethel went off to work on a farm, proving that women could do men's jobs. In 1940, Ethel's daughter, Caroline, recorded that she was working in a munitions factory making bullets, work formerly done by men. In the late 1950s, Caroline's daughter Marcia, a highly qualified nurse, 'lost the sparkle in her eye' when she found that she would have to give up work and take up home duties when she married. Echoes of Helen's 1917 musings? Some of the sparkle returned later when she was allowed to work part time!

The website was submitted to a panel of historians and selected as one of the Victorian projects to be entered in the Challenge and the girls were interviewed about their study. They were delighted to hear that they had been awarded a certificate of commendation. And what did they learn from their study, undertaken apart from and in addition to their usual school work? One said, 'It reinforced our idea that equality is not easily come by. We think women will get equal pay eventually but it will take a while.'

UAW members will be interested in the sources used in the study. The most useful source was Yvonne Smith's book *Taking Time*. Then there was *Left Wing Ladies*; the government website *VROOM*; and an interview with long term UAW member Nancye Smith. Congratulations all round.

PETER GRESTE

Nine UAW members are among those who have written or have pledged to write asking that Peter Greste be released from prison. The Greste family sends warm thanks to them all. Peter's large support base has had some influence. On September 11 the Age reported that the Egyptian ambassador to Australia had said that he 'hoped and expected' that Peter would be reunited with his family 'sooner rather than later'. On November 13 ABC News Radio reported that early in the New Year the sentence handed down to Peter and his two colleagues would be reviewed. On November 22 a short Age article reported that the Egyptian President had hinted that he might pardon Peter and his two colleagues. However, none of this has been formalized with the Australian government, so it is important that we let both governments know that we want this talented journalist back doing the job for which he has been acclaimed. If you would like to help please contact me on 98048485 or at morag.loh(at)bigpond.com

CAMPAIGNING FOR WOMEN AND OLDER PEOPLE

Mary Owen

Mary Owen has been campaigning for women and older people for many years. On behalf of Older Women's Network and, later, UAW-Seniors, she continues to write parties and their politicians to campaign, lobby, and seek commitment. This is part of a report sent to the UAW.

During July/August 2012 I wrote, on behalf of the Older Women's Network Melbourne, to leaders of the federal political parties in Australia, setting out matters of great concern to us and suggesting methods of dealing with these problems. We asked our politicians to let us know what policies they had in mind to deal with the problems we raised and, if they had policies, how they proposed to implement them. We had two replies – not from either of the two major parties.

Two years later, after a change of government, neither of the two dominant parties has spelt out any REAL POLICY other than Stop the Boats and Cut Taxes for the Wealthy and Welfare for the Rest of Us. They just sound off about THE ECONOMY as though it were the same for everyone: the government must not be in debt – although they expect individuals to be in debt up to their ears to banks and other money-lenders – in order to increase production of goods which most people don't need but which ensure high incomes for big producers, including those from overseas.

I have been involved with many women over a long life and have found that most of them are not concerned about cutting taxes for high-income-earners. The economy to them means having enough money to pay for somewhere to live and to provide the essentials for their children: food, illness prevention, (including dental and mental), reliable public transport, education to tertiary level and JOBS – ongoing and properly paid.

Governments have avoided debt by selling off essential services to private industry and we now learn (*The Age* 4/8/14 p.21) that our gas supplies are controlled by Chinese and Singapore government entities and prices are set to soar by an estimated 20 per cent.

According to *The Age* 3/5/2014 p.32, "Australia has one of the lowest government debts in the developed world. Contrary to the alarmist rhetoric, Australia has one of the lowest-taxing, lowest-spending governments of any industrialised nation. The negative-gearing of investments in property and financial securities is a costly international anomaly; almost no other nation uses taxpayer funds to subsidise private speculators. Superannuation tax concessions to wealthy people should be reduced or abolished. It is absurd and obscene that people living on trust-fund revenue can pump money into superannuation at a levy of only 15 per cent and then take it out free of tax. The ability of businesses to play the system to pay a fraction of their fair share of taxes needs review, as do the billions spent on fuel excise concessions for mining and agriculture." Governments are shedding staff; yet Telstra is planning to import staff from overseas. For many older folk the telephone is a lifeline but it is almost impossible for them to understand the people who staff essential service 'phones because they have foreign accents and don't seem to know anything about the service for which they are just a cheap answering service.

Since the party leaders have shown inadequate interest in the problems of the aged, Mary wrote to many MPs and some other party members who, we feel, may realize that one day they too may be old and – especially women – may find it very difficult to survive on the income they will then have.

Mary has received replies from 2 ALP Members and Sue Pennicuik (Greens), but felt that the ALP did seem to be taking up some of the main points and refers to an Age editorial (4.11.14) that spells out what it sees as reasonable demands on behalf of the community. She believes that all this writing and lobbying does have results.

UNION OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN Victorian Sector**PRESIDENT'S REPORT: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2014**

During 2014 we have needed to deal with governments that have no respect for the environment, no respect for scientists, no humanity for asylum seekers, a willingness to put education increasingly out of the reach of most young people, no interest in public transport or the public wellbeing generally, and a determination to make ordinary people do the 'lifting' for society. It has been a year in which the gender pay gap has increased and violence against women continues.

But the UAW has continued to campaign and has joined with others to raise our voices for a fairer, more equitable, more humane and just society for everyone:

Coffee with a Focus: these meetings have provided an important opportunity to hear good speakers on a range of issues, to encourage action, and to meet with UAW members.

- Mary Crooks: *Women and Leadership*. AGM October 2013
- Judy Maddigan: *The Importance of Women's History*
- The launch of *Left Wing Ladies 1950-2012* March 2014
- Anne O'Rourke: *Australian Fair Trade Agreements*. July 2014

Letter writing/lobbying/campaigning:

- We have continued to campaign for a transparent, humane treatment of asylum seekers.
- We have opposed offshore detention and the proposal to send asylum seekers to Cambodia
- We have opposed, particularly, the detention of refugee children
- We have lobbied Premier Napthine and other state politicians to determine their commitment to reproductive rights
- We have continued to campaign for an end to family violence and violence against women
- We have raised concerns about violence in Gaza
- We have supported on-line petitions for a number of causes, particularly campaigns promoted or endorsed by GetUp, but also anti-war measures from the Greens
- We have endorsed a number of rallies to support asylum seekers, including Palm Sunday
- And we have continued to campaign for peace.

Membership has remained steady. Many thanks to Cath Morrison for her hard work and efficiency. We have been saddened by the death of a number of members, including Irena Higgins, who had just celebrated 100 years, Phil Slattery, Nornie Bean, Erica Gilchrist and long-time Organising Committee members and activists Beryl Carter and Lila Ratcliffe.

Branches: Darebin meets monthly on a largely social basis due to the withdrawal of a number of members because of ill health. See a separate report for Southern Branch. Many thanks to Clare Nugent, Amy Duncan and Mairi Neil

Newsletter, Web page

Thanks to the enterprising Cath Morrison the Newsletter took on a new updated and attractive format from mid-year. The good people at Minuteman Press in Lonsdale St print it without charge as a community contribution, and we thank them. We are justly proud of the Newsletter, which

continues to be a valuable means of communication with our members and is often passed on by them to people in the wider community.

Articles have covered a range of topics and there have been considered opinion pieces and contributions from a number of our members. Thanks to the writers and to the mail-out team organised by Fran Mackieson and Jenny Stewart, and with the regular participation of Sarah McQuarrie.

Thanks to Cath Morrison also for the mammoth task of producing the *Yearly Index*. Maintaining and updating the web page has been outsourced.

Left Wing Ladies:

We celebrated the launch of the updated history with a well-attended gathering for International Women's Day. Thanks again to Morag Loh for her talent, time and considerable labour of love.

Taking Time:

The small sub-committee tried again to begin updating this valuable document but encountered some difficulties. We have put the project on hold for the present but intend to examine further possibilities.

Apron

Strings and Atom Bombs has been reproduced, and is available in the office.

Informal Groups continue to give members the opportunity to meet and enjoy each other's company.

The Book Group is going well and is enjoyed by members who have seized the opportunity to discuss writing and ideas within a feminist framework.

UAW-Seniors' Network meets quarterly under the leadership and organisation of Mary Owen.

Pub Lunches have been well attended – they give us a great opportunity to socialise and enjoy our friendships.

Affiliation and Co-operation:

The UAW continues to have representation on, work with and support other groups: Equality Rights Alliance – Carmen Green; National Council of Women Victoria – Carmen Green, Jenny Stewart and Clare Nugent; UNAA Status of Women Committee – Clare Nugent; Ross House Association – Jenny Stewart; Victorian Women's Trust; Women's Health Victoria; WCTU; League of Women Voters; Emily's List; International Alliance of Women, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre. We have supported the Refugee Advocacy Network and have endorsed a number of rallies; we contributed to the Unitarian Church's *People's Audit*. A number of our members have joined Grandmothers (and friends) Against the Detention of Refugee Children. Many of our members are also active in and have links to other organisations.

Organising Committee and Conclusion:

The number of members taking part in the Organising Committee has diminished for a number of reasons: health, family responsibilities and moving away from the city among them. We have therefore had to rethink how we do things. We will concentrate on the activities that we do well – the newsletter, letter-writing/lobbying and Coffees with a Focus. We will continue to share tasks, and we welcome participation from UAW members in whatever capacity. Many thanks to all members of the Organising Committee, including retiring members Allie Dawe, Sarah McQuarrie, Carol Stals and Clare Nugent. Thanks to all who contribute to the success of our functions and activities. We shall continue, as an organisation, to have our voice heard and to make a difference.

Anne Sgro' 28 November 2014

Whitlam's legacy for women cont.

1975 was designated by the United Nations as the International Women's Year. The Whitlam Government appointed Elizabeth Reid to distribute \$3 million of funding to celebrate the year.

No fault divorce: In passing the *Family Law Act, 1975*, the Whitlam Government ushered in a major change to divorce law in Australia. Before the passage of this legislation, a marriage could only be dissolved if one party could prove that the other was at fault in the breakdown of the marriage. 'Matrimonial offences' such as adultery, cruelty or 'desertion' had to be proven before divorce could be allowed. Whitlam and Lionel Murphy removed a major barrier to women's freedom in the stroke of a pen.

It is difficult today to convey to younger women the magnitude of these changes (and so many more) which Whitlam made: they may seem commonplace now- but caused immense controversy at the time- but to those of us who lived through the Whitlam era it was like a new dawn of opportunity. Women today need to ensure that Whitlam's reforming spirit is never forgotten and these achievements for women are not taken for granted...already tertiary education and Medicare are facing new threats, rape crisis centres underfunded and facing closure etc. and many more.

We who remember those heady days, owe it to Whitlam's memory to continue the passion and to "maintain the rage" and must try to bring some of his vision, courage and appetite for reform back on to the current political agenda where it is so sadly lacking.

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