

Union of Australian Women(Vic.) **Newsletter**

WHAT'S ON-JUNE 2015

Wednesday 10 June
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Organising Committee
R1.3, first floor, Ross House

Thursday 11 June
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Book Group
R1.3, first floor, Ross House

Saturday 20 June
2.00 pm

UAW Southern Branch
Mordialloc Neighbourhood House
Main St Mordialloc Speaker:
Janice Munt Advisor to Hon Fiona Richardson
Amy: 9547 6167; Mairi: 0403 900 585
Flyer attached/included

Sunday 21 June
2.30

World Refugee Day Action
There will be various activities in the city, including many 'Grandmother' actions, coming together in the City Square at 2.30

11 June – 12 August
Tues – Sun 10.00 – 4.00

Lemnos-Gallipoli 1915. Women in War
Hellenic Museum
280 William St Melbourne \$10/\$5

Wednesday 24 June
12 noon

UAW Pub Lunch, Royal Oak Hotel
444 Nicholson St North Fitzroy
Tram 96 Bourke St (East Bruns) Stop 18

JULY

Friday 17 July
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Coffee with a Focus
Fourth floor meeting room, Ross House
Speaker: Dr Andrea Sharam
Swinburne University "The voices of mid-life women facing homelessness"

THE 2015 "HAVE A GO" BUDGET FROM HOCKEY & CO.**Cath Morrison**

What a wonderful gift to a grateful nation is this new fairer, 'have a go' budget: BUT only fairer than the last one-and on the face of it "not too bad" -as long as we ignore the trickery underlying many of its measures.

Sure, **child care** is improved in the budget with a subsidy of \$10,000 capped for those earning more than \$185,000 p.a. Nannies will be funded for 4000 families. These changes will improve participation but are partly funded by reducing parental leave entitlements (saving nearly \$1b over 4 years). In a bizarre policy masterstroke, workers who have had **parental leave** from their legal award entitlements are now called "rotters" and "double dippers" and in future will lose the \$11,500 from the existing Government leave scheme and so have less time at home with their newborns. The rest of the cost of improved child care will be made up from the **savings from cuts to family benefits**. Give on one hand and take back on the other! This from Abbott, our Minister for Women, who championed the \$75 000 per annum gold plated scheme for parental leave with no cap on the highest earners until that was dropped in a policy about face. Let's hope the Senate cross benchers see this attack on women's leave entitlements and on families for what it is. The Work and Family Roundtable has been highly critical of reducing the leave entitlements, noting that the employer and Government (Labor) parental leave schemes were intended to be complementary and were aimed at increasing the bonding time for women and their babies at home, up to the six months recommended by the World Health Organisation.

Nothing much in the Budget for **domestic violence** initiatives. The only new federal funding in this budget is \$16.7 million over three years towards the previously announced National Awareness Campaign to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children. This was all agreed at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting [in March](#) (Conversation May 13).

The large cuts to Universities, family payments, health and education in the 2014 Budget are still there in the 2015 budget. The States were hit for \$80 Billion in the 2014 budget for schools and hospitals. None of these cuts has been restored in this Budget. Did Hockey think the States had forgotten? These cuts presumably are to pressure States to raise the GST. The Budget also cut \$10m from indigenous housing, cut \$70m from dental care for veterans and \$130m for dental care for children. THE PBS Safety Net is also under attack but it appears that the Senate will block the changes.

This budget offers **small business owners a tax reduction and** the chance to go out and buy something, anything really, for \$20,000 and write it off their tax. Let's hope they buy Australian-made goods. **Obviously the budget "emergency" is over! What a miracle...and in just 12 months. Tax cuts are now good for the economy, and perhaps deficits not so bad (even though it will be \$35b and worse than predicted).**

The tax entitlements of the already wealthy are not touched in any meaningful way. There have been changes to the pension assets test thresholds which are fairer. BUT, the rate the pension reduces has been doubled from \$1.50 per \$1000 of assets to \$3 per fortnight –this will affect many many pensioners. According to Australian Financial Review and others (John Collette, The Age, 13/5) if you have \$530,000 apart from your house you will lose \$1892 per annum. The Government stands to save as much as they did with the 2014 pension indexation proposals. **(In this context: it is worth remembering that Australia has a relatively low expenditure on age pensions. According to OECD Pensions at a Glance 2013 Australia spends 3.5% of GDP on the age pension, while Italy spends 15%, France spends 14% and the United Kingdom spends 6%. This is largely because our system is means tested. Perhaps not really a need for age pension panic yet?)**

But those retirees with **massive superannuation balances** can still pay themselves a **pension of \$200,000** or more per annum absolutely tax free. **Super concessions now cost about as much as the whole age pension. Not to speak of billions in fossil fuel subsidies.**

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In Australia, a report published in December estimated that the nation's fossil fuel sector was set to receive \$47 billion in federal government subsidies over the next four years (Renew Economy 19/5).

Negative gearing is untouched. **The age of entitlement still lives on for some likely Liberal party supporters.**

Bracket creep/fiscal drag- are strange terms but they mean that as pay rises are granted to average workers the government will take more in tax because the tax brackets have not changed. Personal tax revenue will increase more than 7% each year according to Alan Kohler. The Australian Financial Review noted: *the failure to reset tax brackets will push the average full-time worker, earning \$78,000 a year, into the second-highest tax bracket in 2015-16, with any earnings over \$80,000 subject to a 37 per cent tax rate, 39 per cent including the Medicare levy. As a result, the average worker will be slugged an extra \$1200 in tax a year, and the average income tax rate will rise from 21.7 per cent to 27.4 per cent over the next decade.*

For the unemployed this "have a go" budget means they will now only have to starve for a month instead of the previous six months before benefits start!

Another related big Budget welfare saving which has been little commented on (except by clever Annabel Crabb) is to come from the newly created program "**Strengthening the Integrity of Welfare Payments**". As Ms Crabb says: this is new Abbott-Hockey speak *for catch the rorters and lazy bastards* (ABC The Drum 12/5). What this program intends is an aggressive pursuit of alleged welfare claim fraud and debt recovery. This program is estimated to save \$1.7 billion over 4 years. This in a society where peak welfare bodies all agree that "rorting" welfare is at a very low level and will only serve to make the lives of those on welfare even more miserable.

Infrastructure spending (which would be good at this time when the Government can borrow money so cheaply) is almost ignored by the "Infrastructure PM" in this budget where the only new spending was \$142M to renovate a resettlement facility (prison) for refugees offshore (The Age, May 13, 2015). The Government has even banked as a "saving" the \$1.5 billion previously committed to Victoria for the now happily abandoned East West link.

Foreign aid had a hatchet job. Indonesia down 40%, Africa down 70%. Cambodia and Nauru untouched.

The Budget speech on Tuesday night contained only one reference to the **environment**. Funds for the Barrier Reef come at the expense of the Green Army. The already inadequate Emissions Reduction Fund has been cut further. The Government still hopes to abolish the Clean Energy Finance Corporation.

The independent **Australia Council** has lost \$104 M of its **arts funding** which has gone instead to George Brandis to administer! All Federal funding for The Conversation has been cut: probably too many articles critically analysing Government policy?

Ged Kearney's opinion of this Budget was that **Australian families will be worse off with cuts to paid parental leave and family tax benefits**. ACOSS CEO Dr Cassandra Goldie gives faint praise to a fairer approach to pension reform and increased investment in child care **but notes that the overall package retains many harsh cuts from last year and will leave many on the lowest incomes worse off**.

It would be well to keep these sober and modest assessments in the forefront of voter's minds. Many commentators are of the view that this is an Election Budget designed to get the Coalition a lift in the opinion polls and get re-elected. Beware wolves in sheep's clothing?

(In the context of impacts on women , interested members should read the just released NFAW's Budget 2015: A Gender Lens (nfaw.org) which analyses every issue of concern to women in the latest Budget

ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE IN VICTORIA by Carmen Green

The UAW has forwarded a submission to Victoria's Royal Commission on Family Violence. It was written by Carmen Green with the considerable assistance of Morag Loh and Cath Morrison and amended and approved at a meeting of the UAW's Organising Committee.

Family Violence is an issue that the UAW has been concerned about since the 1980s and since then we have been among the increasing number of women's organisations lobbying government on this issue. In 2015, promisingly, the issue of family violence is now more discussed by both the Federal and State Governments than ever before. For example, "Reducing violence against women" was the top item in the communique at the end of the latest Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting which was a meeting of the Prime Minister, state, territory and local government leaders.

The Abbott Government has announced a \$30 million national awareness campaign on family violence, Bill Shorten has called for a national summit and the Queensland Government has just received a Family Violence Report from a Special Taskforce led by the former Governor-General, Quentin Bryce. There has also recently been a Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence. And finally we have the Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria which has been given widespread coverage in the media.

Hopefully these are positive signs of change in the way Australian Governments intend to deal with this horrific problem. The family violence statistics are appalling. Take Victoria's for example;

- In 2013 there were 44 family violence related deaths
- In 2013/14 more than 65,000 family violence incidents were reported to Victorian Police – incredibly high notwithstanding that it is estimated that four in five women who have been abused have never contacted the police.
- The estimated cost of family violence to the Victorian economy was \$3.4 billion in 2009
- According to VicHealth, violence against women remains the biggest contributor to ill-health and premature death in women aged 15 and 44.

Family violence is, of course, a national problem. Given the fact that the Abbott Government hasn't agreed to a national inquiry, the Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria is significant not just for family violence prevention in Victoria but also nationally. It is anticipated that it will provide further insight into best practice ways of dealing with the scourge that is family violence.

The UAW submission contains 18 recommendations starting with the need to improve the status of women in Victoria and change deeply entrenched misogynist attitudes. The link between gender inequality and family violence is now well-established. When society undervalues and disempowers women in so many ways, it is not surprising that some men believe that they have the right to control their partners by any means necessary including violence. Without this fundamental change, in community attitudes we cannot as a society hope to prevent family violence.

We also recommended a family violence awareness raising campaign similar to the anti-smoking campaign because far too many Victorians still hold deeply ingrained cultural beliefs which blame the victim and excuse the perpetrators of family violence.

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ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE IN VICTORIA.*Continued from page 4*

Other UAW recommendations cover all aspects of service provision for supporting the women and children who are victims of family violence and holding the perpetrators to account. Underpinning the success of any family violence prevention is increased State Government funding for access to refuges, affordable housing emergency housing services and homelessness prevention programs.

The provision of affordable and suitable housing is of utmost importance. The high cost of housing rentals and the appalling scarcity of public housing mean that many women either face the choice of being homeless or going back to abusive partners. 44% of homelessness in Australia is caused by family violence. The Council to Homeless persons has reported recently on just how incredibly difficult it is for women fleeing domestic violence to find affordable housing in Melbourne. They estimate that only one suburb was affordable- Melton 35 kms from the CBD. When people question why women just don't leave violent partners the answer is obvious: there is nowhere to go.

While Victoria has laws providing for exclusion orders (as a condition of domestic violence orders) which require the perpetrator to leave the home, there is little evidence to suggest these are widely used. This is primarily because the woman and her children no longer feel safe in the house where they have experienced violence.

We recommended to the Royal Commission that they investigate ways in which women experiencing domestic violence can stay safely in their homes when the perpetrator of the violence is removed. This would enable children to stay in their schools and retains the woman's connection with her local community.

We also advocated in our submission on the need for long term, well-coordinated planning for family violence services and the adequate provision of services such as crisis lines, refuges, legal aid, up to date video conferencing in all magistrates' courts and family counselling services.

So what should we expect from the Victorian Royal Commission in Victoria and the attention finally being paid to family violence by the Federal and State Governments? Perhaps Australian Governments will finally commit to a bi-partisan, long term, well-funded plan to end family violence, support the victims and make the perpetrators accountable?

Well, while we shouldn't underestimate the importance of all this attention, we are feeling fairly cynical about the Abbott Government's commitment to this area given their cuts to a range of essential support services to family violence services. The Andrews' Government in Victoria, however, has shown a real commitment to tackling family violence in Victoria and we are optimistic that it will implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission and provide the increased funding and longer term strategic planning required for family violence services.

We have never had a better opportunity to make lasting improvements to family violence support services, to the treatment of the perpetrators of the violence and to make the fundamental changes necessary to end family violence in Victoria.

The UAW will continue to monitor this issue and provide updates to members through our monthly newsletter. If members would like to receive a copy of our submission please contact the Office and a copy will be emailed or posted to you.

EQUALITY RIGHTS ALLIANCE: Women's Voices for Gender Equality**by Carmen Green**

ERA is one of five national women's alliances. The five National Women's Alliances represent over 180 women's organisations. They bring forward the views, voices and issues of Australian women and, in particular, women from marginalised and disadvantaged groups. The Alliances take the lead in ensuring that the voices of as many women as possible are heard, especially those who in the past have found it difficult to engage in advocacy and decision making.

ERA has more members than any of the other alliances. It is managed by the YWCA Australia with funding from the Federal Office for Women. Over 60 organisations all interested in advancing women's equality are members of ERA. ERA has a Steering Group with 7 members which meet quarterly. Members focus in particular on the impact of government policy and service delivery on women. They have a Young Women's Advisory Group which focuses on issues of concern to young women. The ERA office is in Canberra and it has 3 staff.

An ERA members' meeting was held in Melbourne on the 6 and 7 May 2014. The meeting was called to review the previous year's work and to agree on a work plan for the coming year. Sixty two women attended from 39 organisations. I attended on behalf of the UAW. The age of the participants varied from women in their 20's to a few like me in their 70's. I was impressed by these younger women activists. They were passionate, professional and effective in their campaigning. Older feminists can feel relieved that the fight for women's rights is continuing to be fought by the next generation.

A wide variety of women's organisations were represented at the meeting including the following: National Foundation of Australian Women; Children by Choice; Victorian Immigrant & Refugee Women's Coalition; Catholic Women's League Australia; Australian Council of Women and Policing; National Council of Women; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; National Council of Jewish Women of Australia; Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement; National Council of Churches; Women in Engineering and Women's Electoral Lobby.

Discussion took place on a number of issues of importance to women. I've chosen to mainly focus on family violence and housing:

National Action Plan against Violence against women was one of the first issues talked about and came into almost all other issues discussed. For example, housing, health, education, sport, child care and inequality. The federal government should have the word women in front of all budget items. Domestic Violence Inquiry is bi-partisan but Federal Government wants States and Territories responsible for education, housing and health –areas of importance in dealing with domestic violence.

ERA's Housing Project – Currently there is no real Federal Government focus on housing so ERA is building a case for national housing policy. There is currently no Minister for Housing. ERA has considerable expertise and research in this area with a focus on housing and women. The importance of housing for women fleeing violence is well documented yet the Federal Government's attitude to housing is depressing to say the least:

- Housing and homelessness contracts have been defunded.
- The Prime Minister's Council on Homelessness has been abolished.
- The National Housing Supply Council has been abolished,
- COAG reform council and select council on housing and homelessness have been abolished. To get the Federal Government to accept that it must be involved in housing will be difficult.

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EQUALITY RIGHTS ALLIANCE: Women's Voices for Gender Equality

by Carmen Green

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One of the many advantages to the UAW of membership of ERA is that it enables us to support ERA's actions on issues of concern to women. This gives us far more say on national issues than we would have if we worked in isolation. For example following on from the Federal Government's budget, ERA circulated to all members a statement for signing on the proposed changes to paid parental leave.

The ACTU and National Foundation of Australian Women have prepared a draft statement for us on the proposed paid parental leave changes.

In short, we are concerned that the move to limit full payment of PPL to women who receive no benefits from their employer fundamentally changes the entire PPL scheme. The PPL legislation specifically provides that the government funded contribution is in addition to employer contributions. The scheme was designed in accordance with the recommendations of the Productivity Commission, and functions in a similar manner to the superannuation scheme, with employers, government and individuals all contributing to retirement incomes.

Removing the universal element of the scheme risks undermining incentives to employers to top up leave to the recommended six month period. We know that PPL increases the chances that a woman will maintain contact with her employer and return to work. Australia's employment rate for mothers is the lowest of all the countries in the OECD at 62%. Universal paid parental leave is a critical strategy in encouraging new parents to stay in the workforce and achieving the G20 goal of increasing women's labour force participation to 25% by 2025. "

The UAW has joined other ERA members in signing on to this letter. The letter has been forwarded to the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Leader of the Greens and cross bench Senators. It was covered on Friday 22 May in the Australian Financial Review and subsequently on social media. In addition just as we are publicising this action through our newsletter it will also be publicised by all the many other women's organisation who also signed it.

The new Federal Government policy on paid parental leave would take effect in July of 2017 if it passes through the Senate. However, significant opposition from other political parties as well as employers and unions mean the measure may have trouble getting passed at all. ERA members including the UAW have also had a part in opposing this detrimental change to paid parental leave in Australia.

Disturbingly, the Office of Women's Policy is reviewing the entire national women's alliance model. The review is being carried out by an independent contractor chosen by the Office of Women. The current contract expires in July 2016. There are now only 5 women's alliances who have achieved continuing funding - one had to disband due to lack of funding from the Federal Government. If the Federal Government disbands this model it will be important to get another national voice for women to advocate on their behalf taking into consideration women's wide diversity of interests and needs.

This is a challenging period for ERA and for the 62 member organisations. It would be a disaster if women were to lose this national voice to the Federal Government.

For more information about ERA and the other funded women's alliances see:

www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/

www.dpmmc.gov.au/office-women/wlds-and.../national-womens-alliances

NOPE, NOPE, NOPE

by Anne Sgro

When you don't think the Government can sink any lower in its policies and responses to people fleeing persecution, violence and poverty, Tony Abbott descends to even deeper levels. His three word response to taking any action to rescue or support the thousands of Rohingyas and Bangladeshis seeking security and in danger of death, or even to share the burden of dealing with the human crisis with our much poorer neighbours, is totally shameful. Australia's reputation in the international community is at rock bottom. We do not even pay lip service to our obligations under the UN convention. The foreign aid budget gives more to the Papua New Guinea province that houses the Manus Island detention centre than it gives to Laos, and quarantines Cambodia from budget cuts because it has agreed to take refugees from Nauru (Age 23.5.15). And where is the voice of the ALP in this? Yet to be heard.

There is an unprecedented refugee crisis unfolding in our area. The Australian navy needs to play a role in search and rescue, as Italians do in the Mediterranean; we need to champion new solutions to address poverty and discrimination; we need to create safe havens. Above all, we need a sense of humanity.

Children in detention. Latest figures from Grandmothers Against Detention of Refugee Children: at 30 April a total of 4,318 children were being detained by the Australian Government. 127 in Australian mainland facilities; 95 on Nauru; 1092 in 'community detention' in Australia; 3004 in the community on 'bridging visas'.

We need to keep the pressure on both our major parties for a decent, fair solution to what is a worldwide problem.

Until 8 June **Freedom.** A photographic exhibition of some who have found freedom in Australia.
Immigration Museum, Flinders Street, Melbourne.

Monday 29 June **Business, Faith, Law and Morality: The Asylum Seeker Debate.**
Speakers include: Julian Burnside and Pamela Curr.
148 Lonsdale St Melbourne. 7.30 – 9.30pm
To reserve a free ticket: bflm.eventbrite.com.au

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