

# Union of Australian Women(Vic.)

## Newsletter

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### WHAT'S ON-DECEMBER 2015/ JANUARY 2016

Best wishes to all members and friends for the festive season.

Thank you for your support and generosity throughout the year and we look forward to campaigning together in 2016 and continuing to make our voice heard for peace, women, and social justice.

Friday 4 – Sunday 13  
Mon-Fri 11.00-7.00  
Sat-Sun 10.00-5.00

West Papua Sampari Art Exhibition  
ACU Gallery, 26 Brunswick St Fitzroy  
Fundraiser and Program of Events  
Organised by volunteer-run Women's office of the  
West Papua DFAIT to support the people of West  
Papua.

Saturday 5 December  
12 noon

Southern Branch's Brunch for Peace at  
Mordialloc Beach. Rotunda, Foreshore.  
Speaker: Rosemary West  
The Environment and the Future of Green Wedges in  
the South East  
Amy: 9547 6167; Mairi: 9587 8757

Wednesday 9 December  
10.30 – 12.30

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

Thursday 10 December

Human Rights Day

#### JANUARY 2016

Wednesday 20 January  
12 noon

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

Thursday 21 January  
10.00 for 10.30

National Council of Women Victoria presents  
its 55<sup>th</sup> Annual Australia Day Ceremony in the Pioneer  
Women's Memorial Garden in King's Domain  
Speaker: Dr Liz Rusher  
*Frances Perry's Legacy and the Women's Hospital*

*Members are reminded that there will be no Newsletter in January*

**“DON’T AGONISE. ORGANISE”! Ged Kearney**

Report by Anne Sgro

Ged Kearney, President of the ACTU, was guest speaker at the UAW’s AGM in November. She was pleased to celebrate and acknowledge our 65 years of activism but pointed out that, unfortunately, women are still battling many of the issues that the UAW campaigned about in 1950 – pay equity and child care being two of them. She later referred to the first Australian International Women’s Day march that took place in Sydney in 1928. Organised by the Militant Women’s Movement, it called for equal pay, an 8 hour day for shop girls, no piece work, a basic wage for the unemployed and annual holidays on full pay. These are issues that are still valid.

In 2015 there are always new challenges for the union movement which is often portrayed in contradictory ways; some statistics indicate that unions are losing significance, others that they are too powerful. What is often not realized is that *“women are the bedrock of the union movement.”* Her former union, the Australian Nurses Federation, is the biggest union. Nurses, teachers, public sector workers, ‘shoppies’ are mainly women and they are unionized. The ANF has 250,000 members, but the union is part of their life from university. It is part of their ‘craft’, in a sense. ACTU research shows that two-thirds of Australians know that unions are important. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) says that Australia is a leader in union membership, in our Award system and the minimum wage. She did acknowledge, though, that the Royal Commission had done damage, as was intended.

40% of the workforce is regarded as insecure – casualised, part-time, contract. Ged admitted that unions have dropped the ball on casualisation and should have started work on it 30 years ago. Women are over-represented here. While many young professionals, such as teachers, are on contracts, so are many factory workers who are forced to get an ABN so that they are employed as ‘independent contractors’ thereby not eligible for leave entitlements, superannuation and other benefits. The big neo-liberal agenda is for a cheaper workforce, and forcing workers onto contracts is one way to achieve this. Increasingly all risks of employment are being shifted onto the shoulders of workers. Unions have exposed the exploitation of foreign workers; so have independent whistleblowers and journalists: in the agricultural sector; 7 eleven, and now Pizza Hut. Ged referred to chicken processor Baiada, Australia’s largest poultry supplier, which uses labour hire companies that exploit foreign workers by underpaying and mistreating them. Interestingly, she thought that it was good that these situations had been exposed by journalists (the ABC and Fairfax) because had they been exposed by unions they would not have garnered such strong reaction. Flexibility has become the new “F” word. Unfortunately, most of that flexibility seems to be the responsibility of workers.

Right of entry to a workplace is difficult for unions. To enter without employer authority means a hefty fine or imprisonment. An official needs to give 24 hour notice, needs to be escorted by the employer to a designated area which may or may not be where the workers are, and, under the FairWork Commission rules, must have annual accreditation. The union rep can still call a meeting out of work hours, but it is limited. An entrepreneur culture is being developed and encouraged, a ‘have it all’ mindset. Women are touted as doing this well – women with small children work from home to develop their own business and spend time with young children. The reality is that they work hard, often not giving themselves wages or superannuation. Half of all start-ups fail.

For women, unstable work comes on top of other challenges. She referred to her mother who had worked all her life: the mother of nine children, she also ran a pub in Richmond. Women workers still carry out most of the caring responsibilities, contributing 13 billion hours of unpaid work to the Australian economy. *“Women pull far more than their weight in the workplace, much more than they are given credit for.”*

Yet as long as the most privileged men dominate the economy, women will struggle. The Federal Government is telling them that, to save money, they will have to choose between paid parental leave and child care. Why? Both are essential.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull opposes penalty rates. Women workers rely on them. His government is proposing to cut Family Tax Benefits. There is too often discrimination against women returning to work from maternity leave. Turnbull and his government are “*apologists for male privilege.*”

A recent symposium of union leaders discussed what Ged called **Uberisation** – whole areas where people are employed through an app, employed *on the cloud*. It is the world of the internet. Jobs are being advertised through the internet overseas, in the languages of the workers, with the companies having no intention of paying the minimum wage.

Unions need to be more visible. How do they contact young people? They need to have a presence in the universities, as with student nurses. Young people are connected to their phones and apps. Can unions tap into that?

Some initiatives and ideas:

- Research is being done by academic Andrew Scott ( *Northern Lights* – a recently released book in which he explains how Nordic countries do so much better in social services, employment support and training, etc) on portable entitlements – giving workers a bank of leave to use when needed.
- How to deal with issues of tenure?
- Set up a union app?
- Give people a phone with union apps already on?

Ged stated that the ACTU has worked hard with the cross benches in the Senate, and values them. Ricky Muir, Jackie Lambie and Glenn Lazarus, for example, have no ties to capital and have lived ordinary working lives.

Ged is one of thousands of female union organizers and officials but acknowledges that there has to be full representation of women in the structure and leadership – that is her aim. She is the third female President of the ACTU, after Jennie George in 1996 and Sharan Burrow 2000. She referred specifically to the great work that is done by Michelle O’Neil from the Footwear, Textile and Clothing Union. In regard to the ongoing battle for equal pay, Ged noted that community workers are predominantly female and are accordingly undervalued and underpaid. In the Finance Sector, there is a 40% difference as women are neither as readily promoted nor given as many commissions. In banks, women are predominantly tellers because this is where they are offered part-time work. She wants a gender audit that tracks this information in workplaces.

**Ongoing union campaigns include:**

- Family violence leave
- Decent and equal pay
- Sustainable industry
- A reformed and fair tax system
- Opposition to the exploitation of 457 visas holders
- Marriage equality

Ged assured the meeting that “*Penalty rates will be fought for every inch of the way.*” She was generous with her time, was informative. Acknowledging the importance of a strong union movement, UAW members wished her well in her work.

## WOMEN, GIRLS AND SPORT

By Anne Sgro

While I am at best ambivalent about horse racing as a sport, I was nonetheless totally exhilarated at Michelle Payne's stunning Melbourne Cup win, her choice of feminist colours and her gutsy speech. She prevailed against enormous odds to realize her ambition and, while acknowledging the support and belief from her own small team, she took aim at the 'chauvinistic' sport of horse racing and hoped that more female jockeys would get a go as a result of her spectacular win. Which brings me to women's sport in general?

My eldest daughter was the best cricket player at her primary school but she was not allowed to be in the team for inter-school sports. No mixed teams were permitted and there were no girls' teams. The late 1970s are a long time off and there have been many changes – girls' soccer flourishes, as does football and cricket. Sport is prominent in Australian culture, but how serious are we, as a society, about women and sport?

I recently attended a session at Melbourne's Wheeler Centre: **the F word: sport**. World great sportswomen Layne Beachley and Leisel Jones were joined by sports journalist Angela Pippas, and they were terrific! They have all done well in their fields, and breathed optimism. Layne Beachley is the most successful female surfer, Leisel Jones the world's greatest female breaststroker. Each has supported other women through mentoring, establishing foundations, and in other ways. Angela Pippas was the most outspoken in calling out "*the myths, assumptions, pre-conceived ideas that keep women in boxes. You have to call it out.*" She asserted that there has been change but that "*it is glacial*" and referred to the casual sexism that is an undercurrent: "*gender asbestos*" she called it because it's everywhere and double standards are rife. Layne Beachley said that there has been a dramatic change in women's surfing, with women being given more opportunities. Pay disparity is a given, and Pippas applauded the Matildas for taking action – not just about pay, but about respect and creating a pathway. Leisel Jones mentioned that, even though she is on a par of medals and achievement with Ian Thorpe, she has been paid perhaps a tenth of what he has earned. All three women on the panel emphasized that women need to support each other and speak out more. They believed that Australia can learn from sporting codes around the world: the US does swimming well and there are many highly skilled female coaches – not the case in Australia. Australia needs a culture change, according to these sportswomen. Angela Pippas declared that too often, in the AFL for example, the decision makers are out of touch with society. Panels are made up of *blokes* who are the *same age, wearing the same shirts*. But it was inspiring to hear their enthusiasm, determination and optimism. They believe that it is up to women to create a pathway for other women and that while change is slow it is happening.

Janice Cross White, secretary and founder of Australian Womensport and Recreation Association (AWRA) recently expressed concern at the lack of participation of girls in sport and lack of government funding at both state and federal levels. It is acknowledged that physical activity is important for health, yet

- 38% of women in Victoria do no physical activity
- 35% very low
- 19% moderate
- Only 8% have a high level of physical activity \*

\*(From a report to the UAW Organising Committee on a National Council of Women Vic meeting by Carmen Green – September 2015 Minutes).

A recent UK study found that girls under 8 years are generally confident about their ability in all sports, but between 9 and 10 they begin to lose this confidence. What is at play here? It is noticeable in the school yard – girls sit around more, and in inner city schools where playground

**WOMEN, GIRLS AND SPORT cont.**

space is limited, it is boys who take most of the available area. Spaces have to be set aside as 'girls' spaces' but girls then need to be encouraged to use them, and it needs to be controlled. I don't remember that being a factor in my secondary school years and early teaching career in high schools where yards were strictly segregated. What is going on here? Are we encouraging passivity in our girls? Is it too hard to create and maintain the required levels of encouragement and enablement?

Australian sportswomen generally receive poor media coverage and certainly very low pay. Yet 2015 has seen many high-quality achievements by Australia's women athletes. In netball the Diamonds won the World Cup – they received better pay than other teams because they joined a union which negotiated better payments. The basketball team, the Opals, qualified for next year's Olympics. *The cricket team, the Southern Stars, trounced arch rivals England in the Ashes, and are sitting pretty atop the one-day world rankings...Last week the internet was in uproar at the news that in 2016 the average international female cricketer could earn \$85,000, compared with the men's \$1 million average. The women's figure, however, is in reality far lower – about half as much* (Isabelle Westbury, Age, 5.11.15).

The Matildas not only play well but also, unlike their male counterparts, behave well and are great role models for younger women. They have also stood up for the right to earn a decent salary and be treated with respect. Why didn't they get support from their male counterparts when they refused to play? Female participation in AFL soared by 46% this year as the push towards a national women's competition is intensified. *The launch of the Twent20 Women's Big Bash League is set to be an exciting spectacle, attracting overseas talent and encouraging media coverage before it's even got underway.* (Isabelle Westbury). Meanwhile, the Australian men's cricket team behaves badly, as does our young tennis star, and AFL footballers often behave in an unacceptable way.

As a result of the successes there has recently been some good media coverage for women, but in general both media coverage and financial support is sadly lacking. There is little government emphasis on promoting gender equality in sport. One exception some years ago was when the then Mayor of Moreland, Stella Kariofyliadis, insisted that funding for local sporting teams and their facilities would depend on their targets of encouraging and facilitating the participation of girls. *The AWRA wants governments to provide gender parity in sports' facility funding. Recently the Federal Minister for Sport gave \$100m to the AFL (\$75m of which was for a grandstand) but where was the funding for women's sporting facilities?* (Carmen Green).

Journalist Malcolm Knox asks why we don't have women in sports such as darts, snooker, racing car driving. *"In so many of those sports where women and men could – theoretically! – compete on equal terms, they don't, because an atmosphere is created in which women are not welcome. Horse racing has a lot of ground to make up, but at least it does have a Melbourne Cup winner, if a few decades overdue"* (Age 14.11.15). Michelle Payne's victory highlights a need for change, for investment and belief in women's sport.

Angela Pippas urges us to *"Go out and watch women's sport, talk about it, and it will change"* and *"We need to look at the sporting landscape and think of our daughters."* And perhaps I could add, our grand-daughters and young women in general. It has been an exciting year for women and sport, and we have something good to build on. Let's keep up the momentum.

## CHILD POVERTY AND CHILD PROTECTION

As a result of Prof Judith Bessant speaking at the October meeting of the National Council of Women Vic, our delegate **Carmen Green** sent the following letters on behalf of the UAW.

### **To Christian Porter, Federal Minister for Social Services:**

*Anti-poverty week which ended yesterday has raised the attention of many Victorians to the fact that poverty and severe hardship still affect the lives of more than a million Australians many of whom are children. These children live in families suffering from a multiplicity of problems many of which are related to poverty. Many of these children remain with their families and some end up under Government protection.*

*Members of the Union of Australian Women are aware of and appalled by the increase in poverty and inequality in Australia. The Gillard Government's decision to take single parents off parenting payments and onto Newstart when their youngest child turned 8 meant that overnight these already struggling families had their incomes cut by \$60 per week placing them 77% below the poverty line. Many of the children growing up in these families or in child protection have a very grim future. They often grow up with sub-standard educational opportunities and lack of adequate health care. It is difficult to believe that in a wealthy country like Australia we are letting this situation continue.*

*Our members were disappointed with your recent comment that you want to cut spending in your new portfolio. Given the urgency of addressing the situation where over a million Australians, many of whom are children, continue to live in poverty we ask you to reconsider your recent statement and instead give priority to funding a national plan to tackle the plight of families living in poverty with particular focus on improving the lives of children.*

### **Carmen also wrote to the Victorian Minister for Families and Children, Jenny Mikakos:**

*...We have been disturbed by well-informed comments that in spite of the many government inquiries and recommendations we still see too many children and young people removed from their homes and placed in state care. These children are then treated significantly less well than required by relevant international instruments like the UN Convention on the Rights of the child and other domestic legal frameworks or community standards.*

*One of the legislative changes that will become effective from March 2016 will affect children who have been out of a parent's care for more than 24 months. For those children the court will no longer be able to make or extend a reunification order. Does this initiative address the problem of securing stable care for young people in a timely manner and what it might mean for the prospect of reunification of families struggling in a contest of increasing inequality, poverty and family violence?*

*Children are the most vulnerable group in society and the most poorly treated in terms of policy and the law. They are among those most likely to have their rights abrogated – authority figures talk in front of them as if they're not there and until recently they could be physically assaulted. There have been numerous state enquiries into children in state care. These enquiries always come up with recommendations as to how to fix the system but they don't talk about how we address the social and economic issues that make the problem in the first place.*

*Many of the children growing up in these families or in child protection have a very grim future. It is difficult to believe that in a wealthy country like Australia we are letting this situation continue. Does the Victorian Government have a plan to tackle the plight of children living in poverty?*

*We would welcome your comments on the points raised in this letter.*

**Call for Commonwealth/State funding for women's refuges. Anne Sgro**

The UAW has supported WEL's new Commonwealth/state funding model called WRAP (Women's Refuges and Housing Program) designed to address the need for a dedicated policy and funding program for women seeking refuge from violence. Women's refuges save lives.

We have written to both PM Malcolm Turnbull and Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews asking for their support at the COAG meeting 27 November.

*In recent years funding for women's refuges has been subsumed into general homelessness funding, which has failed to acknowledge or adequately support refuges for the homicide prevention work they provide. Escaping domestic violence is vastly different in character from general homelessness and requires specialised programs.*

*The WEL proposal has been supported by the Union of Australian Women and other women's groups. It has been sent to the COAG Advisory Panel on reducing Violence against Women and their Children where it is under consideration.*

*The COAG meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> November is an opportunity for your Government to support a proposal that will help to ensure that women and children escaping violence will find a safe haven and support through a well-funded women's refuges service.*

As Anne Summers writes [theage.com.au/comment](http://theage.com.au/comment), 13.11.15: *It should not be too much to ask that while we do the necessary work of ending the violence, we make sure we make available the money to provide shelter to the women and kids who are suffering as a result right now.*

WEL also organised an on-line petition to Malcolm Turnbull to coincide with 25 November White Ribbon Day, requesting that *he act swiftly to agree to a long-term secure, separate national funding program for women's refuges to ensure women and children have a safe haven and access to specialist services to enable them to rebuild their lives.*

The ABC's recently broadcast program on Family Violence, *Hitting Home*, with journalist Sarah Ferguson, sets out the horror and extent of violence against women and children in Australia. Is it becoming worse, or are we just more aware of it?

What I have also found horrifying is the role of the Family Court in removing children from the custody of their mother when she has raised questions of abuse (November *The Monthly*). The role of fathers' rights groups has been most effective in suggesting that women who claim sole custody are either exaggerating or vindictive. It is an area of concern for campaigners like Rosie Batty. Journalist Jess Hill details the history of the Family Law Act 1975, and changes to it particularly since the 1980s. It makes for disturbing reading.

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**Annual General Meeting**

The following members were elected at the AGM, 17 November 2015

**UAW Organising Committee 2016**

**President:** Anne Sgro  
**Vice-President:** Amy Duncan  
**Treasurer:** Patrizia Archivio  
**Secretary/Public Officer:** Cath Morrison  
**Committee:** Fran Mackieson, Jenny Stewart, Carmen Green.

Member Wendy Freeland indicated a willingness to also join and will be formally co-opted at the December Organising Committee meeting.

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