

Union of Australian Women(Vic.)

Newsletter

WHAT'S ON-OCTOBER 2015

Sunday 11 October
2.00pm
"We won't be silenced"

STAND UP FOR REFUGEES
State Library
Organised by the Refugee Action Collective

Wednesday 14 October
10.30 – 12.30

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

Thursday 15 October
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Book Group
R 1.3, first floor, Ross House

Wednesday 21 October
12 noon

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

NB: No UAW Southern Branch meeting in October

DIARY- NOVEMBER 17

UAW Annual General Meeting

**1950 – 2015 ! Join us as we celebrate 65 years of activism for women,
peace and social justice**

Tuesday 17 November
10.30 – 12.30

4th floor meeting room Ross House
Speaker: Ged Kearney, President ACTU

The Role of Unions into the Future

Put the date in your diary now! Invite your friends.

ASYLUM SEEKER POLICY: KEEPING THE PRESSURE ON

By Anne Sgro

It took a photograph of 3 year old Aylan Kurdi, washed up on a Turkish beach, to create a world-wide wave of compassion for the plight of the thousands of refugees and the dangers that they and their families face as they try to reach a safe haven. Like the photo of a little girl fleeing napalm in Vietnam in the 70s, the photo of a child had the effect that countless reports had not been able to manage. There was an outpouring of grief and horror, and a desire to help somehow.

Yet it is relatively easy to feel compassion for a child so far away, and to me there is an element of hypocrisy here. So many Australians are not able to transfer the image of the little boy to the hundreds of refugee children who are suffering in detention at our own hands. For so long there have been bi-partisan policies and rhetoric designed to dehumanize and vilify asylum seekers. We don't know their stories of persecution and fear even though 93% of those who are processed are found to be genuine in their claims. Most are seeking refuge from countries torn apart by civil war and violence. Yet they have effectively been silenced and made invisible. Access to those on Manus and Nauru is limited. A veil of secrecy has been drawn – no transparency here. The Border Force Act has outlawed disclosures of information about detention centres and threatens 2 years imprisonment terms for doing so.

The Senate committee investigating alleged sexual exploitation of women and children on Nauru has claimed that the detention facility is unsafe for children. There is lack of child protection on the island which is supposedly responsible for dealing with those brave enough to report harm. Transfield is about to have its contract renewed for another five years, although one hopes that the GetUp campaign to discourage investment in the company will have an effect on its finances. The Australian government effectively dodges any responsibility.

Professor Louise Newman is the vice-president of Doctors for Refugees. She has been speaking out about the detention of asylum seekers, particularly children, for years. *"The damage to children in detention is immediate and also has long-term consequences. The legacy of trauma includes mental health and developmental problems and a life often scarred by memories of the conditions in detention."* (Age 17.9.15) The detention and cruel treatment of families and others is rationalized as being a deterrent. We must tell our new Prime Minister that this harm is unacceptable and that Australia can and must do better.

The UAW has written to Malcolm Turnbull :

The Union of Australian Women was most heartened to hear you state that, under your leadership, there would be no more slogans, but rather intelligent discussion about issues and policy.

One policy that we would like discussed in an intelligent and humane way is Australia's asylum seeker policy...

Given the acknowledgement of a world humanitarian crisis in which people are fleeing for their lives, and that we have "stopped the boats", can the Australian government now re-examine its asylum seeker policy giving precedence to the release of children and their families from detention."

We have to be out there, to be seen and heard. My Grandmothers' group in Wills holds a weekly vigil on a busy street corner and has received good coverage in the local Leader. We need to constantly contact politicians of all persuasions and demand that the secrecy be stopped, that the middle of the night bashing on doors be ended, and that we change our diabolical policies – telephone, email, write. Let's turn compassion into action.

THE FORGOTTEN PEOPLE -30 YEARS OF ECONOMIC GROWTH IN DOVETON by Cath Morrison

I've just been reading a great book by Dennis Glover called: *An Economy is not a Society*. I also heard him speak at the Melbourne Writers Festival. Although Glover is a former ALP speechwriter and political adviser (most recently to Julia Gillard), he does not spare the Labor Party in his critique of the 30 year pursuit of productivity at the expense of human dignity. In fact, Glover caustically remarks that: *Labor has to remember that it is primarily a social movement, not a policy unit of the Treasury*. Creating a better society should be the desired outcome for Parliamentary Labor rather than creating a better economy.

Glover's thesis is that the last 30 years have seen both parties pursue economic policies based on growth of GDP and productivity gains. These policies have improved the living standards of some sectors of our society but these gains have been at the expense of the "murdered suburbs" such as Doveton (near Dandenong), Broadmeadows, Norlane near Geelong, Elizabeth in SA and other similar towns which have been stripped of their lifeblood which came from the large manufacturing plants. In Doveton in 1970 there were 7450 full time permanent jobs: three jobs for every family. Now Glover says there is one job for 5 families (540 jobs) and high levels of unemployment.

Glover writes with passion and wit and from lived experience of growing up in a working class family in Doveton in the 60's and 70's. He writes of the security of income and employment which the manufacturing plants gave to the thousands of workers in Doveton who worked there and who used the works canteen, the many social clubs and other amenities offered by GMH, International Harvester and the other large employer Heinz. His father took great pride in the wonderful cars that he helped to produce at GMH and his mother and sister worked at Heinz. Glover and many of his classmates at Doveton HS went to university (free at the time) or to TAFE and then on to satisfying careers (one is in the Victorian Parliament). Life was good for the young Glover in Doveton and for his family and for many other families. When the suburb's factories shut in the 1980's, Doveton suffered a mini-depression "which like a runaway steamroller smashed everything in its path." In his talk at the Writers Festival, Glover said that Keating had been proud of 'liberating' workers from the drudgery of such factory work, but there is no liberation in whole families on the dole, or in joining the ranks of the working poor with casual unskilled work the only option, whilst living in trashed and poverty stricken suburbs with high crime rates and drug use.

Thirty years on, little has changed according to Glover. When he returned to Doveton last year he saw schools closed, many shops shuttered and empty and no work for most. Ice and alcohol abuse everywhere. Glover says that Doveton is now the fourth most-disadvantaged suburb in Victoria (ABS). What we have done in places like Doveton is to create a new economic class- *a non-working class...Our economic revolution has created it so it is our moral collective responsibility to remove the "non" from non-working*. Greater productivity and growth was supposed to float all boats as the tide rose...but Doveton's boat is beached and its people have not shared in the rewards. We must care about them and their future.

Unless we can persuade government that economic growth at all costs is immoral and that the social costs of such growth must be offset: that people must be shielded from the destruction of industry, and new jobs created to take the place of the old jobs, inequality will continue to flourish and the world we create will not be worth living in for many.

Glover's book puts a human face on the costs of economic restructuring in Doveton and though he has been accused of undue nostalgia, this passionate essay on the legacy of inequality really spoke to me. Unfortunately, given current policy there will be more suburbs like Doveton created in the future. I recommend this book as a telling critique of the social cost of economic growth.

MELBOURNE WRITERS FESTIVAL August 2015

by Carmen Green

Every year I look forward to attending as many sessions as I can at the MWF. This year there were over 400 events to choose from in a programme which included both well-known international and Australian writers. I attended events from a wide variety of authors whose books provoked discussion on important subjects such as the Middle East, climate change, feminism, media, inequality, immigration, nuclear weapons and the plight of writers in countries where writers are censored by the State. On a less serious note, I attended sessions where, for example, writers read their short stories and discussed why books are labelled women's fiction. I also attended 2 sessions on Renata Singers' book "Older and Bolder" –the second of these focused on sex after 60 and starred 93 year old UAW member Rose Stone in conversation with Renata and Monica Dux.

Most of the sessions were held at Federation Square but I also attended sessions at the Shrine, the QVWC, the Wheeler Centre and 45 Downstairs in Flinders Lane.

The session at 45 Downstairs was called "Is climate change the new apocalypse?" Most people think that climate change is now the major threat to life on earth. In this session two writers discussed how they explored this issue in their fiction. People who attended this session also had the opportunity to visit an exhibition on climate change called "Is this how you feel?" where Australia's leading researchers on climate change responded to the question "How does climate change make you feel?" The exhibition show-cased their framed hand written letters. These researchers have devoted their lives to researching climate change but this was the first time they had been asked to describe their feelings. They wrote with passion and express fear, anxiety, despair, disappointment and optimism in their answers.

It's too late to see the exhibition now but you can see the letters on the project's website see: <http://www.isthishowyoufeel.com/this-is-how-scientists-feel.html>

Out of all the writers I heard , I've chosen to write up the key note address by Tariq Ali for this article because he is such a stimulating and informative speaker on recent world politics and history and I think that UAW members will find his comments interesting.

Tariq Ali was one of the leading speakers at the MWF where he spoke as part of the Festival of Dangerous Ideas. He is a British/Pakistani writer, journalist and film maker. He is a member of the editorial committee of the New Left Review and contributes to several newspapers and journals including The Guardian and The London Review of Books. I have written the following from notes I took at his lecture. If you would like to watch him speaking with Robert Manne at the Bendigo Writers' Festival 2015 see:

<https://www.themonthly.com.au/video/2015/august/29/1440826363/beyond-extreme-tariq-ali-con>

Tariq spoke on what he sees as "Pointless Elections" and the MWF summary of his talk was as follows: "What's the point of elections if the result is always a victory for the Extreme Centre? In the post-Cold War world, politics is now a contest between who can better serve the needs of the market. Tariq Ali asks: is this political wisdom or suicide?"

Tariq believes that there is now widespread disenchantment with both politicians and the belief that deregulation and free market solutions will provide answers to the world's problems. Major parties have coalesced in the centre and democracy is in danger.

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Tariq asked the question: how has the world changed since the fall of the Berlin Wall in the 1990's and the end of communism and the cold war? There was then such hope for a future where the "peace" dividend could - in place of expenditure on armaments - be spent on things that matter, such as education and health. But instead of a peace dividend we have seen wars that go on and on. A characteristic of neo-liberal governments is wars abroad. In Afghanistan war has continued for over 30 years and is still ongoing. War in Iraq started in 2003 with the US led invasion which - with the downfall of Saddam Hussein- created a huge vacuum in Iraq from which all sorts of groups emerged including ISIS. Now there are ethnic cleansings with Sunnis versus Shiites in Iraq and other countries in the Middle East. The civil war in Syria has further destabilised the area with millions of refugees fleeing this conflict. So the Arab world created after the 1st WW is now in a state of collapse. Palestinian leadership has been defeated as Israel is both militarily and politically stronger. The US dominates in the Middle East and is now bombing areas in Syria as well as in Iraq.

In relation to the economy, the neo-liberal economic system established after the fall of the Berlin Wall now dominates the capitalist world. This system is based on privatisation of public services, high household debt, high unemployment and increasing casualization of work. These changes have been made with Government support. The resulting neo-liberal society takes it for granted that private capital will be involved in essential services such as education, transport and health. Neo- liberal societies always put the needs of the public second to the role of capital and the need to make a profit. Attempts since the second WW to make society more equal are now totally undermined. Beginning with Reagan and Thatcher, there has been a real transfer from the poor to the rich. At the same time there has been a decline in the quality of the media which is now much less diverse and challenging to government.

Neo-liberals have developed a political structure that backs the economic system. Thus Clinton's New Democrats and the Blair/Brown Labour Party continued the Reagan/Thatcher policies. In Eastern Europe there has been privatisation on a massive scale, increased unemployment and migration to other European countries. Migrants leaving Eastern Europe for Britain & France will often work for low wages causing huge resentment and resulting hostility to migrants and refugees. Politicians from the Extreme Centre increase this hostility by identifying enemies – Muslims now, Jews in the 1920's and 30's.

During the 25 years prior to 2008, we were told by our leaders that the market determines everything and we don't need regulation. After 2008, millions of dollars were spent in financing the banks which had caused the problem in the first place. While at the same time European countries (Italy, Spain, Greece, Ireland & Portugal) -which were all in a state of collapse because of loans from these same banks - had austerity imposed on them by the EU causing draconian cuts to pensions, increasing unemployment & cuts to public services. Tariq doesn't support the EU which he sees as a mechanism for bankers & financial capital.

Tariq has hope that there will be change for the better and reminds us that the history of humanity is not a linear progression but up & down. He believes that at the moment there are hopeful signs of change in Scotland, in Spain and in Greece. He is also heartened by the increasing popularity of Jeremy Corbyn in his campaign to lead the British Labour Party.

Tariq challenges all of us to work to restore democracy in society in whatever way we feel we can be most effective.

PAT GRIMSHAW SPEAKING ON VICTORIAN WOMEN'S HISTORY AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN'S HERITAGE VICTORIA
by Cath Morrison

Recently, along with Anne Sgro, I attended the launch of Women's Heritage Victoria (WHV) at the Lyceum Club in Melbourne. The UAW has been supportive of WHV since its inception. There were around 100 people present, including UAW (Vic) members Mary Owen and Sheila Byard (also NCWV), and a number of interstate visitors including Queensland Senator Claire Moore, a member of the UAW Queensland (who told me she reads our UAW(Vic) Newsletter with great interest). After a welcome by the President of the WHV Steering Committee Judy Madigan, Professor Pat Grimshaw gave an inspiring keynote speech, highlighting "the vital and fascinating history" of the women of Victoria which WHV will commemorate.

Pat began by noting that Women's Heritage Victoria aims to provide a centre where the achievements of Victorian women can be celebrated (to complement other Victorian institutions such as the State Library, Museum Victoria and the Public Records Office). It will provide a specific focal point for all those who want to know something of the history of Victorian women.

Pat reminded the audience of the outstanding women's institutions which began here in Victoria and which continue to flourish, such as the National Council of Women (Vic), YWCA, the League of Women Voters, Union of Australian Women and the Victorian Women's Trust. We should commemorate the women who pioneered women's participation in political party organisations -Ivy Brookes, Dame Elizabeth Coachman, Margaret Guilfoyle, Beryl Beaufort, and the women in local government and state parliament from Millicent Peacock, Ivy Weber, Doris Blackburn all the way through to Joan Kirner. Victorian women were in the forefront of feminist activism: women such as Beatrice Faust (WEL), and of course Germaine Greer whom Victoria can claim as well. The fight for women's political citizenship in the late 19th C with Henrietta Dugdale and Vida Goldstein foremost amongst many women activists would be highlighted by WHV. Indigenous activists also, who asserted Indigenous rights to full citizenship with forcefulness and dignity from the women on Coranderrk in 1881 through to women such as Gladys Nicholls, Merle Jackomos, Margaret Tucker to Muriel Bamblett and Geraldine Atkinson. We must also memorialise- along with the Anglo and Irish culture -the ethnic diversity of the women of Victoria, and the contribution of Italian, Greek, Asian, Middle East and African women. The Victorian Honour roll gives us so many names of Victorian women since 2001 who are leaders in all fields of endeavour. There is a rich array of choice of women to celebrate from the recent period as well as in the past.

We could celebrate philanthropists such as Janet Clark and Phyllis Frost, Dame Elisabeth Murdoch; women in music from Nellie Melba to Kylie Minogue; artists such as Clarice Beckett and Clara Southern; and writers from Ada Cambridge to Helen Garner. Fields such as gardening (Edna Walling) , law (Joan Rosenove, Marilyn Warren) , sport, nursing -the list goes on – from medicine, teaching and academia, business entrepreneurs to union leaders, Victorian women have been in the forefront. All these themes and women could be recognised in special WHV exhibitions.

Women's Heritage Victoria will preserve women's records that institutions cannot accommodate (possibly through digitising them, listing the contents and placing the holdings on the Australian Women's Register); display banners, pamphlets & badges etc; establish a website and links to online records and women's history websites; provide outreach programs to high school students and acknowledge the wonderful women of our history in exhibitions and talks.

Overall, the WHV will make better known the rich heritage of women within the history of Victoria.

UAW UPDATE

by Anne Sgro

New Prime Minister, new start?

Malcolm Turnbull has received huge coverage in the media in the past week, mostly positive. Perhaps it is such a relief to have an end to the 3 word slogans – *Stop the boats, Nope, nope, nope* – and to the pugilistic mannerisms that people have overlooked the reality - it will be business as usual. It was easy to ridicule Abbott and he became increasingly unpopular. Turnbull is another question: urbane, seemingly reasonable, consultative... but let's not forget the policies. In order to maintain power and support he will stick with the status quo on climate change, marriage equality, punishing young unemployed and everything else. He has given the government a reasonable face but I consider him much more dangerous. Will the Labor Party have the policies, the wit and the personality to combat this change? More than ever, we need to keep the pressure on in whatever way possible.

Banning Nuclear Weapons – Australia out of step

Freedom of Information documents accessed by ICAN (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons) indicate that the Australian government is increasingly worried about the growing momentum behind an Austrian initiative aimed at setting the stage for negotiations on a global treaty banning nuclear weapons – “*in light of their unacceptable humanitarian consequences.*” (See August Newsletter). The Australian government convened a closed-door meeting of mostly NATO states at its mission in Geneva in February to discuss how best to deal with the Humanitarian Pledge which now has a commitment from 116 nations. The treaty would compel nations such as Australia to stop claiming the protection of another nation's nuclear weapons. Australia believes that, as long as nuclear weapons exist, we will rely on the deterrence factor of the US nuclear arsenal. This puts Australia at odds with our neighbours in SE Asia and the Pacific, all of which have rejected nuclear weapons outright. Good news is that the ALP's platform from its recent National Conference states “*Labor supports the negotiation of a global treaty banning nuclear weapons and welcomes the growing global movement of nations that is supporting this objective.*” www.icanw.org.au

UAW congratulates Planning Minister Richard Wynne in a recent letter

On behalf of the Union of Australian Women Victoria, I write to thank you for taking measures to control the density and height of apartment development in the CBD. We are concerned that, for some years, there appear to have been few regulations to ensure the sustainable development of the city, and hope that your action will encourage better apartments as well as improved housing affordability.

We also congratulate your government on the decision to provide housing from the now cancelled East West Link to alleviate homelessness. We hope that the remaining properties may also be used to fund more public or social housing.

New books to look out for

Dinner with the Devil by Helen Macrae. A story about the women who founded and worked for the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital, and the women who fought to have it saved.

Respectable Radicals: A history of the National Council of Women of Australia. To be launched 11 October.

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