

Union of Australian Women(Vic.)

Newsletter

WHAT'S ON-SEPTEMBER 2015

Wednesday 9 September
10.30 – 12.30

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

Thursday 10 September
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Book Group
R 1.3, first floor, Ross House

UAW UPDATE

Professor Gillian Triggs

We wrote to Professor Triggs, President of the Australian Human Rights Commission expressing our support and admiration for her in the face of violent attacks on her by the Federal Government (July Newsletter).

She has replied:

“I was very encouraged to receive your letter and to know that I have your support. Thank you for taking the time to write to me and for your kind words. Your letter gives me and my colleagues at the Commission great encouragement to stay the course”.

No to bombing Syria.

The UAW has written to the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, urging him to not extend Australia's involvement in the Middle East by joining bombing raids in Syria.

We have also written to the Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten, requesting that any such decision not be supported by the ALP.

Launch of the Women's Heritage project.

The project was formally launched Wednesday 26 August at the Lyceum Club. The UAW was represented by our delegate on the Heritage Steering Committee, Cath Morrison and the President, Anne Sgro. Around 100 women attended this very well supported function.

WHO PROFITS FROM WAR?

By Anne Sgro

Sometimes it seems that the news is all bad – violence, bombings, destruction, torture, death and human misery. Prime Minister Tony Abbott has flagged the idea that Australia could join in the bombing of Syria, action that would ensure that thousands more traumatised Syrians would flee for perceived safety in bordering countries or in Europe, adding to the 60 million people who are displaced in the world. No such decision should be made without the consent of Parliament, but why make it anyway? The US has requested Australian support, but not the Syrian government (which seems to have been bombing indiscriminately) and certainly not the United Nations. And why are the US and Australia focusing only on Islamic State when the issue is much more complex? What would be the long-term strategy or like in Iraq, do we not have one?

Can't we do things differently? Haven't we learnt anything from our disastrous and criminal invasion of Iraq? In the Mediterranean, the human tide continues. 90,000 have landed in Italy so far this year, hundreds have drowned (SBS Dateline, 11.8.15). Thousands are landing on Kos, Greece. As the reporter stated, "If there is peace in Libya, the crossing will stop." There is an enormous crisis of failed and failing states in the Middle East, much of the responsibility for which resides with the West. And people will continue to flee. *A report in June by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that at the end of 2014, an unprecedented 59.5 million people were on the run from war and persecution – half were children;*(Editor's emphasis) *if seen as a population, they would be the 24th largest country in the world, between Italy and South Africa (Age 15.8.15).*

As Barbara Chapman recently wrote in a letter to the Age (28.7.15) "...the poverty, wars, persecution, starvation, rogue regimes, arms trade and climate catastrophies that generate refugees could be stopped, contained and/or ameliorated if there were simply the global political will to do so." Trillions of dollars are spent on war every year. It is an industry, a "racket".

"War is a Racket" is the title of a book written in the 1930s by retired US Marine Corps Major General Smedley Butler, known as "the fighting Quaker." At the time of his death, he was the most decorated Marine in US history. He wrote that war is a racket, the only one that is international in scope, the only one that in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives.

Recently I read Doris Lessing's story of her parents, '**Alfred and Emily**' (2008). It is about two people whose lives were ruined by WW1. The first part of the book is an imagined story of what their lives could have been without the war. The second part is biographic. At the end, Lessing contemplates the fact that we no longer discuss the profits of war. *"When a war starts up in Africa, a pointless war, apparently for the sake of a few acres of scrub, my parents, that generation, would have said '**It's the armament makers at it again. It's the profiteers.**' And what has it achieved at the end of it? A few hundred dead, but millions of pounds spent on weapons, safely lodged in somebody's pockets...**Profiteers and armaments-makers – gone from our speech and, so it seems, from our minds.**"*

We have to speak again about the disgraceful profits made from war and violence. And we should certainly not be rushing into another war to distract from difficulties and unpopularity at home. We need to increase our spending on foreign aid, dramatically increase our humanitarian refugee intake, treat asylum seekers with humanity and care, and seriously campaign for peace. We have to keep at it and keep asking: Whose interests are being served?

RECOGNITION FOR WW1 NURSES

LEMNOS GALLIPOLI COMMEMORATIVE COMMITTEE MEMORIAL SCULPTURE UNVEILING

Saturday 8 August , Foote Street Reserve, Albert Park.

Report by Carol Stals

On this appropriately cold and blustery day a moving ceremony took place. It was held 100 years to the day that the Australian Nurses landed on Lemnos, to experience their own version of hell.

The first port of call for Gallipoli victims, these women each had a huge responsibility for a large number of seriously wounded patients. They lived and worked in tents, no shade or protection from the elements and initially no water. Basic doesn't seem to describe it. However they brought with them their Aussie resilience and made the best of their chosen job.

A crowd of us huddled closely around the huge number of seated dignitaries with the sculpture, covered in a red cloth, fluttering in the breeze.

It was good to see the Australian and Greek flags flying together in this suburb so well settled by Greeks. The Royal Australian Navy Band played superbly. Early in the ceremony a group of nurses and some soldiers were piped through the crowd, re-enacting the photo of the nurses being piped to their tents on their arrival.

I had been privileged to be able to follow the development of the dreams for this sculpture for some time and it was wonderful to see it come true. Aunty Caroline Briggs performed a Welcome to her Country, followed by Amanda Stevens, Mayor of the City of Port Phillip. She said the essential words, of this being Women's History and how seldom women are acknowledged for their efforts. Only fairly recently has the community been aware of the role played by our nurses in WW1.

A long, phone book like line of VIP's followed, all with interesting messages, some in Greek. The Lemnos community are very proud that they have brought this about and Gavin Jennings recognized this by saying they had achieved the unachievable in working for a positive outcome with all three levels of Government, Local, State and Federal (all of whom had given funds) as well as several Unions. The politicians were amused by this statement.

Peter Corlott OAM, designed and built the sculpture and was generous in his praise of the assistance he received from others. He has created many other well loved sculptures in public places.

A Nurse, based on Matron Grace Wilson stands, looking wistfully over her shoulder – towards Gallipoli, with her long veil fluttering. Below her sits a weary and wounded young Digger. It was said that he is in her "lee" and her protection still falls over him. Simple and moving. The sculpture is not a direct likeness of her but fused with the classical images of the God Hephaestus and Queen Hypsipyle. She stands with her back toward Port Phillip Bay, from where the nurses sailed to their duties. I do hope you will visit her, just outside the Gasworks Park and pause and reflect on her 100 year journey to recognition.

I was saddened that none of the papers or TV channels thought it important enough to cover, typical of the treatment of Women's History, unfortunately.

“THE WAY TO GET THINGS DONE IS TO DO THEM”: ANNE SUMMERS**Damned Whores and God’s Police...40 years on.****Report by Anne Sgro**

A talk by Anne Summers that I was recently fortunate to attend was organised by the Melbourne Writers’ Festival and City of Geelong Libraries. This is a brief report of a stimulating, booked out session.

How much has changed for Australian women since the book was launched in 1975? Are we better off today? YES! Australia has changed. In 1975, International Women’s Year, there was a lack of laws to enforce equality. An anti-discrimination policy had been introduced into the Senate but Whitlam was dismissed before it could become law, and we had to wait until 1984 for the Hawke government to pass the Sex Discrimination Act. There was no legal redress for discrimination in the workplace and there was constant denigration of women.

In the 1970s, feminist demands were: Free 24 hour child care; Free abortion on demand. Imagine that as today’s slogans! Then we were feminists – radical, lesbian, etc. Today we argue about feminism and what it means. We need to change **things**, not worry about definitions. We need to celebrate our 1st female Prime Minister, our 1st female Governor General. They would have been unimaginable in 1975. And we need to support women in politics in the future, make sure that we watch their backs. Women in Parliament should reflect society.

The book is a snapshot of how things were. Language has changed considerably, and language is important. Re-reading it is “like taking an historical excursion in time.” We didn’t use ‘gender’ then. We didn’t use ‘domestic violence’. When we set up Elsie (the first women’s refuge in NSW, established by Anne Summers and others), we knew what it was about but were ill-equipped to talk about it. There were two types of women – Madonna or whore. Women were kept in check by their roles as wife and mother. They were not culturally approved as anything else. Are women still constrained by the social imperative of children? We have changed a lot, but we haven’t really confronted this. It is still largely women who keep the family together, and stereotypes have been updated – children or career? for example. Women do have more choices and are more likely to have those choices accepted but there is a timidity that constrains so many of us.

There are shocking levels of domestic violence. 58 Australian women have been killed by their current or past intimate partner so far this year. If 58 had been killed in another way, there would be outrage. The Prime Minister attends the funerals of soldiers; why not those of women killed by their partners? The level of support has diminished: in NSW, 80 out of 100 refuges have been closed. Elsie is now run by St Vincent De Paul, by men, and it is not open 24 hours. On the positive side, there is a Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria, and in Queensland Quentin Bryce has given advice to the government following her research into the issue. Violence against women is both a cause and a result of gender inequality. It is the most significant gender issue in the world.

In 2016 **Damned Whores and God’s Police: the colonization of women in Australia**, will be updated, the 4th time since it was first published. The book is a living thing. It is part of the story of who we are.

In discussion, Anne Summers talked about the pros and cons of the beautification industry. In the 1970s, body image wasn’t an issue. She wore neither make-up nor underwear. Now, society has created false needs and the commodification of our bodies is a huge industry. Women and men now need ‘products’ – trivial things we worry about.

In answer to a young woman asking how to help young women, her answer was: **“The way to get things done is to do them. Create a precedent. Blaze trails. Do it, and do it loudly. We have to shout about our achievements”**.

Hear! Hear! What a fabulous session. Now I’m off to look for my copy of the book.

UAW SOUTHERN REPORT - AUGUST 2015**By Mairi Neil**

On Saturday, August 15th, a small dedicated group braved the wintry weather to hear Pauline Brown speak about Labor for Refugees and provide an update of the ALP's National Conference decisions regarding asylum seekers.

Labor for Refugees is a group within the Labor Party fearless in taking the fight for humanitarian policies to the MPs and being the conscience of party members on this important issue. Pauline is a part-time Education Advisor at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre in Footscray, is involved with Rural Australians for Refugees as well as Labor for Refugees.

Her first memory of multiculturalism is of being in Grade 4 at Brunswick and being chosen to teach English to new Italian migrants. In Preston, in 1959, her schools stopped at the migrant hostel and picked up kids for school. Nowadays we lock refugee children in detention and they are unable to attend school and asylum seekers are deemed 'illegal' and demonised!

Labor For Refugees was formed in 2001 in response to the Tampa crisis. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tampa_affair) Party members realised they needed to work for humane, compassionate, just and fair policies. UAW member Amy Duncan was one of the founding members. A central part of the policy was regional cooperation particularly with UN High Commission for Refugees in countries like Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand.

To actually create a queue because as Pauline explained, there isn't one at the moment!

Where can people go in Afghanistan for a visa? The Australian Embassy is in a top-secret location for security reasons. Afghans can go to Pakistan, but the Taliban is there. Is it any wonder they make their way overland to Asia.

In Indonesia the UN representative sees 8 people a day - there are 10,000 people waiting - at the current rate people will be waiting 20 years for an interview!

Regional processing is about assessing people before they get on a boat.

There were 3 key areas put forward at Conference:

- closure of detention centres on Manus and Nauru Islands
- all children must be out of detention
- a Labor government should not turn back boats

As we all know there have been dreadful reports coming out of the offshore detention centres. (<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/hundreds-of-children-abused-in-detention-report-20150210-13b10a.html>) More people have died than have been granted asylum. There is evidence of medical neglect, abuse and brutality.

At 30th June there were 945 men in detention on Nauru. 41 have been granted refugee status, but it is too dangerous to go anywhere else in PNG and they've been put in a transit camp waiting for freedom.

On Nauru there are 88 children, 114 women and 453 men. All there more than 2 years.

The evening before our meeting the 7.30 Report interviewed a doctor speaking about the dreadful abuse of children offshore. He had tears in his eyes describing the number of children with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and meeting a six year old girl who tried to kill herself! As a nation we must seriously ponder our humanity - what brings a child of 6 to a decision life is no longer worth living?? (<http://www.smh.com.au/national/its-child-abuse-australian-doctor-brought-to-tears-by-treatment-of-nauru-detainees-20150813-giysx9.html>)

Last year, Scott Morrison secured Ricky Muir's vote in the Senate by promising children would be released from detention, but there are still 127 children detained on the mainland. We then saw the

Abbott Government's vilification of Gillian Triggs, another shameful episode to prop up the policies of Turn Back Boats and Offshore Processing.

(<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jun/07/peter-dutton-says-gillian-triggs-should-consider-resigning-as-human-rights-chief>)

In detention, children refer to themselves by number, not name - this is how the guards speak to them too. **Psychologists have noted children have forgotten how to play.**

Regarding turning back boats much was made at the ALP national conference of Tony Burke's emotional speech when he suggested it was the only humane policy. However, Pauline regards the speech as a good argument for mounting Search and Rescue operations.

Labor For Refugees worked hard in the months leading up to the conference to shift opinions. The current ALP National Platform says that children are not to be detained at all. It also says that, where possible, their parents should not be detained either. The lines from this proposed policy most important to Labor For Refugees taken from paragraph 160 of chapter 9 of the current ALP platform: Labor will ensure that:

- ***asylum seekers will not be punished for their mode of arrival***
- ***asylum seekers who arrive by air or by sea will be treated the same when it comes to the processing of their claims and access to support while on bridging visas.***
- ***claims to protection made in Australia will be assessed by Australians on Australian territory.***

The group engaged in representations with the union movement in an effort to get trade unions onside and organised forums to formulate policy. They wrote to the 36 National Presidents and Secretaries of unions affiliated with the ALP including a copy of the book "***The Drownings' Argument***" published by Labor for Refugees as a response to those politicians who claim that we need offshore processing in order to stop people risking their lives on boats. The book, a collection of essays, launched in Geelong on 11 October 2014 by Ged Kearney, President of the ACTU has this observation from Julian Burnside on the back cover:

"People like Abbott and Morrison express their concern about refugees who drown. They are not sincere, but it provides a vaguely respectable excuse for harsh policies. I will say this plainly: when Abbott and Morrison say they are worried about refugees drowning on their way to Australia they are lying: they are deceiving the public. It opens the way to mistreat asylum seekers who have not drowned, and helps them pursue the darker purpose of keeping refugees out."

Fifteen high profile Labor women supported a letter demanding an end to abuse and the closure of Manus Island Detention Centre and this was posted to all delegates thinking there'd be a vote to close detention centres. However, **there was not even a vote!**

Labor For Refugees also manned a stall at Conference, which became a meeting point, especially for the unhappy and disappointed people on the Sunday. Friday people were hopeful, Saturday they were anxious, by Sunday they were sad and angry, but determined to keep up the fight.

At the Conference the group had a fringe event with speakers such as Ged Kearney, David Manne, Julian Burnside and Shane Price.

Where do we go from here?

- Recognise there have been positive improvements in Labor's policy:
- A Labor Government will legislate to have human rights obligations incorporated into local laws, which will enable legal challenges.
- A Labor Government rejects the practice of referring to asylum seekers as illegals

There will be a repeal of some of Morrison's Bills:

- assessment will be fast tracked
- Refugee Tribunal reinstated
- abolition of Temporary Protection visas
- reintroduction of the UN Conventions
- Increase of refugee intake by 29,000 by 2025

At the moment the intake target is 13,750, but the question must be asked why wait until 2025 for the increase, why not immediate?

Australia takes 109,000 net migration including those coming for business or family reasons.

There is 59 million displaced people in the world - the greatest humanitarian crisis on record.

About 58 million of those just want to return home and be safe.

In Lebanon 260 per 1000 of population are refugees living on their border. Even if we increased our intake to 50,000 it would be only 2.4 per thousand of Australia's population.

The ALP policy is children out of detention as soon as possible, it should be NOW - if not, why not?

There will be an independent advocate for children with mandatory reporting of child abuse on or offshore. Pauline also reminded us that there are 28,000 refugees living in the community who have no right to work. These people are waiting for an opportunity to apply for residency, meanwhile they live in despair with skills and educational opportunities lost.

Here are excellent articles with views from ex-MP Tony Windsor:

<https://newmatilda.com/2015/07/09/weve-sent-them-away-die-tony-windsor-lashes-out-hard-line-refugee-policies>

<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/opinion/topic/2015/06/27/asylum-seeker-policy-dark-spot-australias-history/14353272002050>

Amy distributed a transcript of a recorded speech made by Julian Burnside to Labor's national Conference and all present agreed there is much to do to change the minds and policies of the current crop of politicians - Labor and Coalition - but keep up the fight we must and engage with as many people as we can in our daily life to have the conversations that are needed to bring sanity, humanity and compassion back to Australia.

UAW SAYS "No" TO BOMBING IN SYRIA

The UAW has written to the **Prime Minister:**

You have been reported as saying that you will consider very carefully whether to order Australian defence forces to participate in bombing in Syria. On behalf of the Union of Australian Women Victoria, I write to urge you to reject such a proposal. The war in Syria is complex and, multifaceted. IS carries out atrocities, there is no doubt about that. But who would Australia be supporting – the Assad government which bombs its own people, opposition forces? What would be the end goal? Australia joined the United States and the United Kingdom in an invasion of Iraq that had no legitimacy, no focus for the future and that triggered the instability and chaos that has ensued. Australia should put more effort into helping the United Nations resolve the conflict, not take action that seems to have no legal basis and would possibly exacerbate the situation.

And to the **Leader of the Opposition:**

But we are also most concerned that a decision to go to war can be made in Australia by one person, the Prime Minister. In the UK and US elected representatives of the people formally debate such an issue before a decision is made. In Australia, both houses of parliament should debate and then decide. Would the Opposition be prepared to amend Australia's War Powers Act to make this change? Will the Opposition urge the government to NOT intervene in the violence and unrest in Syria?

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Newsletter published by UNION OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN (Vic)
Ross House, 2nd Floor, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000

Website: uaw.org.au

Ph. /Fax 9654 7409 Email: office@uaw.org.au

Victoria Inc. A00021219R