

Union of Australian Women(Vic.)

Newsletter

WHAT'S ON - FEBRUARY 2016

Welcome to 2016.

We hope that you had a relaxing time over January with family, friends, books, films ... however you enjoyed yourself. Now be prepared for action.

You will find the 2016 Diary and Southern Branch meeting dates included.

We look forward to your participation, energy and support. It will be another year of campaigning!

FEBRUARY

Wednesday 10 February
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Organising Committee
2nd floor meeting room Ross House

Thursday 11 February
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Book Group
R 4.2, fourth floor, Ross House

Thursday 18 February
11.00 – 2.00

UAW-Seniors Network
R 4.2, fourth floor, Ross House

MARCH

Celebrate International Women's Day with the UAW.
Tuesday 22 March 10.30 – 12.30

4th floor meeting room Ross House.
Speaker to be announced.
Put the date in your diary now!

WHAT IS IN STORE FOR 2016?

By Anne Sgro

That is a question I have been asking myself and it is difficult to find an answer that involves any optimism other than a continuing belief in the power of ordinary Australians and our organisations to effect change.

Anyone who mistakenly felt any cheer at the election of the suave Malcolm Turnbull will have now accepted the reality that nothing has changed.

Climate Change. 2015 was globally the hottest year on record. Fires, floods and drought in Australia, destructive storms in Britain, tornadoes and blizzards in the US – and Environment Minister Greg Hunt approved Abbott Point and the go-ahead for the Adani coalmine in Queensland – *“the pollution from that single project will almost entirely wipe out Australia’s pollution reduction commitments in Paris. Big polluting companies are continuing to damage our climate, and we are experiencing the consequences here and now.”* (Imogen Jubb, Climate Reality Project at the Australian Conservation Foundation. Age 8.1.16).

Asylum Seeker Policy. There is no halt to Australia’s unremitting cruelty and our disregard for human suffering. Under Turnbull, time spent in detention has reached a record high of an average 445 days. It is costing billions of dollars to destroy the mental and physical health of detainees, the government takes no responsibility for its policy results and continues to shroud detention in secrecy. For UAW letter to the PM re refugee children see Page 7.

Violence Against Women. Two women a week are estimated to be killed by current or former partners. Yet for all the rhetoric, funding to support women continues to be cut. The latest to lose out is the Australian Women’s Health Network – *“AWHN is the only organisation currently representing women’s health and well-being on the national stage”* (Fiona McCormick, CEO Domestic Violence Victoria Age 26.12.15).

Attitudes to Women. Jamie Briggs and Peter Dutton have clearly indicated by action and speech how they view women. Briggs resigned, Dutton is still there, supported by Barnaby Joyce – all senior Coalition members.

Paid Parental Leave. New parents are likely to be up to \$10,500 worse off under the latest proposals put forward by the government – women in health, education and retail. Fair Agenda says the cuts *“amount to a cut of four to six weeks of average living costs and leave parents with government provided paid leave for only half the 26 weeks it is recommended they have with their child for health and welfare purposes”* (Age 14.1.16).

Wages and Working Conditions. \$43 million was spent on a Royal Commission that referred only two people for possible action while doing its best to present unionists as “louts, thugs, bullies, thieves, perjurers”. Extraordinary, really, when you consider that the real face of unionism (as Ged Kearney pointed out to us in November) is nurses, teachers, paramedics, fire-fighters and public servants. Corruption and dodgy practices have occurred and cannot be excused, particularly as they have too often related to personal gain and power. But where is the investigation into fraud and corruption in the banking and finance sector, the underpayment and exploitation of workers by 7 Eleven, Australia Post and the agriculture industry – exposed by unions, whistleblowers and journalists? What of the attack on penalty rates?

Further attempts to force Australians to pay more for health.

It would be easy to become despondent in the face of government policies and actions. What is positive are the actions of ordinary people through the use of social media such as change.org; letters to the press and politicians; support for organisations that campaign for change and decency; celebrating as more people speak out. It is much more useful to become enraged and energised – to have a say in whatever way possible. We need to be alert and active in 2016. We look forward to your support.

WOMEN IN SPORT: A YOUNG SPORTSWOMAN'S VIEW OF SPORTS INEQUALITY

Cath Morrison

Clare O'Neill, member for Hotham (ALP) spoke in parliament on November 14, 2015 regarding a prize winning essay by a young sportswoman and school student, Bria Raso. Bria, a 15 year old secondary school senior student, won the Hotham Writing Prize for her essay about the inequality between men's and women's sport.

Clare said: Girls of today are bombarded with images of unattainable beauty. Through all these provocative and sexualised pictures it's difficult to find depictions of positive body image and to find strong, confident female role models. For some girls, just fitting in is a struggle, for girls that are athletically motivated it can be even worse.

These words are not mine, though I do wish I had written them. They are the words of Bria Raso, of Heatherton Christian College, and I would like the House to join me in congratulating Bria, who is the senior winner of the Hotham Writing Prize. Bria wrote me an incredibly passionate, well-argued essay about gender equality in sport. Bria is a very talented soccer player. She plays most days. But she is very frustrated that she sees more attention, resources and focus given to boys, even when they are playing at the same standard as girls. She thinks we need to encourage the participation of girls in sport, and I could not agree more—not only so that we see equal treatment on the sporting field but also to make sure that girls around this country have plenty of attainable, healthy role models for body image, something that women struggle with a great deal. We need to do more to make sure that girls and women are treated equally and sport. Bria, congratulations. It was a really important issue that you raised with me, and it is an honour to be your voice in the House of Representatives.

Bria, (reported in the Moorabbin Kingston leader, December 23 , 2015) said that:

"I would like to encourage more girls to get out and play sport, but I see a lot of them stopping because there aren't the same opportunities," She said.

"We don't get the same media coverage and there isn't a chance to make a career in it because girls just don't get the same amount of money as men."

I heard of Bria's achievement through her grandmother and I thought UAW Newsletter readers would enjoy hearing the voice of this young activist on the issue of women's participation in sport which we also feel is very important for women's equality. Bria's essay is reproduced below.

As a young girl who is heavily involved in sport I find it very hard for women to be able to thrive and succeed in this area as we are not given the same opportunities that men are given. Women participating in sport generally have less opportunity to advance or excel in their respective sports.

Most female athletes have not received adequate support from television networks, sports executives, promoters and people within their respective communities. Women work just as hard as men, so, they deserve equal opportunities.

All men are created equal and not just members of the male gender but all Australians, women have excellence in sports in so many ways and should not be held back to their full potential simply because they are female.

We teach our children that hard work will be recognized but we don't teach them that hard work doesn't always bring equal opportunities and that is because of sexism and inequality.

The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF) reported that in 2013 women's sport received 7% of coverage and 0.4% of the total value of commercial sponsorships. This is a vicious circle, because of the lack of sponsorship many athletes, even those who represent their countries, have to fit training around employment. 61% of fans surveyed by the WSFF said they believed sportswomen were just as skilful as their male equivalents and over half said women's sport was just as exciting to watch. In Britain 750,000 adults took up team sports after the Olympics 500,000 of them were women.

Did you know that schools cannot use a myth that "boys are more interested in sports than girls"? There is no proven research that shows boys to be more interested in sports than girls - a combination of lack of opportunity, lack of peer group support and lack of encouragement causes girls to drop out. Girls have 1.3 million fewer opportunities to play high school sports than boys have. Despite recent progress, discrimination based on the real or perceived gender identity persists.

Girls in sports may experience bullying, social isolation negative performance and the fear of being tagged 'gay' is strong enough to push many girls out of the game. As girls grow up the quality level of their sports may decline. The facilities may not be as good as the boys venues and the playing times may not be optimal. The availability of quality, trained coaches may be lacking in their community or these coaches may be more focused on the boys. Equipment and even uniforms are not funded for girls.

Today's girls are bombarded with images of external beauty, not those of strong, confident female athletic role models. To some girls, fitting in with the mold that they are constantly told to stay in is more important than standing out. Girls should be encouraged to play more sports because they learn important life skills such as teamwork, leadership and confidence. Most female athletes have more positive body-images than non-athletes. Female sporting events are hardly ever given enough coverage on TV but when they are it's much more common for them to be portrayed in sexual provocative poses, which is disgusting and NEEDS to be stopped!

Being a young woman myself and playing soccer on a regular basis, although I do a lot of training and play every day at school, it is still very hard for me to play at higher levels than what I am playing now.

Most talent scouts aren't interested in the girls as we don't get enough attention from the public and our games are not viewed as much as the boys. For example in 1908 Marie Marvingt was denied the right to ride the Tour de France because she was a woman: she ignored the rules and raced anyway only 15 minutes behind the men. Of the 115 people who started the 4,488 kilometre race that year, only 37 managed to complete it: 36 men and 1 woman.

It's time that we stand up for female athletes and you can help by going and watching their games such as soccer, AFL, basketball etc. most female athletes can perform when given the chance. They need your help: contact the television outlets and demand to see more women's sport appear on TV. There are superstars waiting to be discovered and their stories will touch your heart.

We congratulate Bria Raso on winning the Hotham Prize and for her well-argued and important case for greater opportunities and recognition for women in sport.

It is fabulous to hear young women's voices speaking out on issues of importance to women.

SOUTHERN BRANCH REPORT, DECEMBER 2015**By Mairi Neil**

On Saturday, December 5, we held our annual Brunch for Peace at the Beach with guest speaker Councillor Rosemary West from the City of Kingston. We are fortunate that Rosemary often shares her extensive knowledge about the workings of council and also her passion and commitment to a sustainable environment, which was her topic for our final meeting :**The Environment and the Future of the Green Wedge in the South East.**

The dozen or so members present were treated to a history and detailed explanation of the importance of Green Wedges. It was lovely to see President Anne Sgro and also Morag Loh, who was fragile but home from hospital. The weather was kind too - and Amy had secured the ideal spot for our group in the Rotunda with a table groaning under the usual feast. Rosemary was a well-known and successful journalist for *The Age* before election to Kingston Council in 2003. At *The Age* she wrote mainly on women's issues. The environment was about recreation - a day in the country, a setting for a nice picture. However, once she decided to get involved with the environment movement, and in particular the Green Wedge activists, the devotion of people involved, impressed and motivated her to fight too. Glenda Burn, a former ABC journalist worked on Trevor Shewin's election campaign and organised a forum on Green Wedges and Rosemary was hooked. She showed detailed maps to explain the what and where of the green wedges and chain of parks - there were originally nine.

The Friends of Braeside Park were concerned about the rezoning of Keysborough and proposed sub-divisions that would encroach on their sustainability. They knew Rosemary was a writer and asked if she would write a submission. The Defenders of the South East Green Wedge got in touch and they met in Professor of Planning, Michael Buxton's seminar room. (Not to be confused with his cousin, who as some of the members pointed out, is ironically in real estate.) At this time Harry Van Moorst from the Green Wedge Coalition was pressuring the Bracks Government to protect all green wedges. Bracks held Community Cabinet meetings and Michael gave a draft strategy to government, which was accepted, but Rosemary admitted 'it has been a battle to defend ever since.'

The battle in Kingston is unrelenting with the Planning Department forever wanting to rezone land. Fortunately, in 2015, the council appear to be making an effort in the northern part for the first time. Kingston's C143 amendment rezones old quarries and landfill tips to green wedge and assures no more concrete crushers and similar inappropriate uses. Meanwhile, there was a rezoning application to build and divide up land, and as has been the usual stand off in council, the subdivision approval went through 5-4. However, Barry Moss, on behalf of the Green Wedge group took the decision to VCAT at personal cost of \$900. The Council employed a senior barrister at \$5000 a day, but Barry won and the proposal for subdivisions was withdrawn. A victory for the environment. Residents owe immense gratitude to people of Rosemary and Barry's calibre who never give up the fight.

However there is a proposal to rezone an area as residential and cut the Green Wedge at the neck. The Council spent \$68,000 but the Minister refused Council's application - they need a strategic justification to get past the Minister and the proposed rezoning too close to landfill. Three threats have been dealt with but currently there is another attack. The Cemeteries Trust, chaired by the Mayor of Brighton, want to remove the market gardens and build a cemetery. If this happens it would be the end of food growing in the Green Wedge. Rosemary asked the UAW to write to the state Health Minister and stress the importance of keeping market gardens, retaining the land as open space and for suitable recreation and not a commercial enterprise such as a cemetery. The Cemeteries Trust comes under the Health Minister's jurisdiction.

A chain of parks trail, agricultural activities, equestrian activity such as a riding school, or even environmental conservation such as a horticultural school - all of these preferable to commercial enterprise involving a lot of buildings, concrete and cars!

Rosemary's presentation was inspiring on the one hand because we have people like herself actively working to retain the Green Wedge and with a vision about what could be, but it was also revealing how dispiriting the battle can be with murky politics and even murkier decisions. We need to ensure politicians exert their power wisely and also have the political will to ensure timely action is taken.

The Planning Minister needs to ensure a chain of parks and the Green Wedge is a priority and all areas are listed to guide future spending and decisions. There must be clear guidelines as to what activities are not suitable for Green Wedge areas; arable land must be protected, our food bowl should not be destroyed. Rosemary has a motion before Council regarding Open Space and the Cemetery – 2016 looks like another busy year to push for sensible environmental decisions and to protect any gains made. The people of Kingston are lucky to have such a hard working and plucky councillor.

The Southern Branch thanked Rosemary and Amy broke out the champagne and despite the doom and gloom and so many fronts to fight for social justice, we raised our glasses and toasted our successes, our fellowship and our vision.

We may encounter many defeats but we must not be defeated. Maya Angelou

Breaking News from Rosemary's newsletter: The Minister has approved the Mentone Structure Plan Activity Centre Zone but has converted the four-storey height limit from mandatory to discretionary!! Thus undoing the previous minister's decision to make it discretionary!! Does the Minister not realise the depth of community feeling over this? And that the planning panel supported Council's resolution for a four storey height limit? The fight for sensible, sustainable environmental policies continues

LETTER FROM IRENE GALE Some of us received a long, newsy email from South Australian Member Irene Gale. We would like to share fragments with you.

Life has been fairly quiet for me this year. Old age is baring its teeth at me – 83 in a few weeks – so I am fairly tottery and tired. People keep sending me emails to forward on around the place, telling of events and actions coming up and inviting others to join in.

I am appalled by the cutting of services for ordinary people, which pour out from our government day by day – yes, with the changed government led by the 'charming merchant banker'. The majority of people will suffer these cuts, and be charged higher prices for education and health services, to name but two, while the ultra rich sail along untouched, and somewhat untaxed. Some CEOs who were sacked for poor performance walked away with massive separation packages. Our recently 'sacked' Treasurer is to be given the plum foreign affairs posting, becoming Ambassador to New York, stepping over the Foreign Affairs Department people who have worked for years in the field and are far more appropriate to be given the post. And so it goes on.

The family continues to grow and age, and most are doing very well, and are involved in a wide range of interesting projects and campaigns. How did they come to be so involved in trying to make the world a better place for all? Can it be that the elder ones have spent their lives joining their parents in such 'trouble-making' activities, and have taught their children and grand-children to do the same? It's marvellous to see my kids, grand-kids, and great-grand-kids, all thinking about others and joining in efforts to bring about justice, equality and peace, in whatever way they can. It gives me hope for the future of the world.

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AUSTRALIA IS MORALLY CULPABLE. FREE THE CHILDREN!

The situation of refugee children in detention goes from bad to worse. The UAW wrote the following letter to the Minister for Immigration, Peter Dutton, in late December 2015.

I have just read in today's Age newspaper that asylum seeker children on Nauru are no longer permitted to receive pen-pal letters from children in Australian schools. This comes on top of the decision to refuse to allow children in detention in Victoria to be taken on an outing by the Brigidine Sisters through their asylum support project.

On behalf of the Union of Australian Women Victoria, I write to ask you for an explanation. Who is making these punitive decisions? Is it Australian Border Force, Broadspectrum, or are the orders coming from your Ministry? Or can't the Australian public know because these decisions come under "operational matters"?

We are dismayed by these small, seemingly petty decisions that have removed a small joy from the difficult lives of refugee children. Australians can surely do better than this.

The harmful effects of detention on children have been well documented. We renew our call for children and their families to be released from detention into the community, and that asylum seekers be treated with humanity and decency.

We look forward to your clarification of the issue.

Since then, we know that many children on Nauru are foregoing education as they are targets of physical and verbal abuse from pupils and teachers in the Nauruan system. Further, a plea by 900 Australian academics for the release of children has been unanswered and dismissed by a government so arrogant that it believes that it can do what it wants with human lives – Minister Dutton has stated that 72 more children will be sent to the hell-hole. Let's hope that the petition organised by a Castlemaine woman on change.org will rally huge numbers of people in opposition to such a move – and that the reality of the damage being done to innocent children will horrify enough Australians to make them demand that the children be freed.

VALE GRACE WRIGHT. We have just recently heard that former member, Grace Wright, died towards the end of last year. Grace was a gentle, kindly, unaffected woman who began work in the Flinders Street rag trade when she was 14, and was a working woman all her life. She joined the UAW in the 80s, was particularly active in Save Albert Park and gave early support to asylum seekers. Until she became frail and unwell she came regularly to UAW functions, loving the idea of our organisation – that it spoke out for women.

HURRAY FOR MARY OWEN, who will be celebrating her 95th birthday in February. Happy Birthday Mary, and best wishes!

LETTER FROM IRENE GALE cont'd from Page 6

I hope that all is going well with you and yours, and that the people of the world are soon able to live decent, safe and happy lives – it's long overdue!!

Luckily there are a lot of good people around, all beavering away at the world's problems. All strength to them – and us!

Greetings,

Irene xx

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