

Union of Australian Women(Vic.)

Newsletter

WHAT'S ON – JULY 2016

**Wednesday 13 July
10.30 – 12.30**

**UAW Organising Committee
2nd floor meeting room Ross House**

**Thursday 14 July
10.30 – 12.30**

**UAW Book Group
2nd floor meeting room Ross House**

**Wednesday 27 July
12 noon**

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

Sheila Byard OAM!

Congratulations to UAW member Sheila, President of the NCW Victoria, who received the award in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for Services to women. Well deserved.

ELECTION 2016

Let's hope that the July 2 election delivers a result for humanity, decency Equality and a forward looking Australia for all people. At this stage we cant count on it. So gear yourselves up for more activism ahead!

THE ROBOTS ARE COMING: IS A UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME A SOLUTION TO STRUCTURAL UNEMPLOYMENT?

Cath Morrison

Given the current debate in Australia regarding 'welfare' which is regarded by many on the right of the political spectrum as a drain and a burden, it's hard to imagine a future Government implementing a scheme where every man, woman and child is given a fixed income as of right without means testing. As Eva Cox reminds us (The Conversation 20/6): *Welfare dependency is usually framed as the result of people's sins and failure to try. But there is little doubt that (the unemployed) also encounter structural barriers. Many lower-level jobs are gone or going, with technology replacing workers and slowing demand for market goods. These changes suggest the need to reconsider income-support policies, which is recognised in other developed societies....The idea has a long history, but recognition that there may not always be enough adequately paid jobs for everyone has given it renewed momentum. So, the question is how we design universal payments that offer stability and well-being while accommodating change and mobility.*

Unfortunately there are no signs of such enlightened views coming from either major party in Australia. In this seemingly endless election campaign even the derisory amount paid to job seekers has not received a mention—jobs, jobs, jobs is the mantra on both sides. There is no recognition that not too far in the future many people will not have jobs.

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE AND UBI:

There is a new imperative which is giving renewed life to this debate.

Much has been written and discussed about the increasing likelihood of robots not only replacing humans on manufacturing production lines (already the case) but increasingly replacing skilled work which was once considered impossible for robots to do successfully. Now according to many commentators the main field of work which will be available to humans will be in the service and caring sectors.

Job growth, in the age of robots, will only be for the most highly skilled in our society: *...jobs involve dealing with new information, thinking creatively, or working with people.* Clancy Yates (The Age, 31/5/2016) notes also that *...as well, smarter computer programs will also be able to do some "cognitive" jobs that we previously thought couldn't be automated, such as writing formulaic reports, such as news stories on stock market movements.*

It is therefore not alarmist to see ahead of us much larger numbers of people without meaningful work or any prospect of such work. This will put our social fabric, already showing strain -with increasing inequality well documented-under intolerable pressure. There will need to be massive changes to accommodate this. The unemployed will not be a minority but may eventually constitute the bulk of society. How will we live in this new world and how will social cohesion be maintained? The benefits of the increased productivity brought by technology will be great BUT must be fairly shared...how to do it is the issue. A Universal Basic Income has been proposed as one solution.

DEVELOPMENTS OVERSEAS TOWARDS A UBI

The introduction of a Universal Basic Income or UBI has recently been advocated by both left and right overseas. The concept of a set amount of money paid to all citizens without means

testing has been around for some time and there is a website devoted to news and discussion of UBI: Bien (Basic Income Earth Network) www.basicincome.org.

There is now serious discussion of the UBI in Finland, England, Scotland, New Zealand, Switzerland, Netherlands, Canada, amongst others. The schemes vary in detail and amount but have in common the universal nature of the payment.

It is also an idea that seems to have wide public support. *A recent poll by Dalia Research found that 68% of people across all 28 EU member states said they would definitely or probably vote for a universal basic income initiative. Finland and the Netherlands have pilot projects in the pipeline* (Guardian June 2, 2016). If we call a UBI a “National Productivity Dividend”, as some economists have done, the nature of the payment is more understandable as are the arguments in its favour. The concept has faced its first proper test of public opinion, as Switzerland voted this month on a proposal to introduce a national basic income which received support from 25% of Swiss voters.

Both sides of politics have their reasons for advocacy. There are pros and cons which are fairly obvious. If the amount was smallish, and other welfare was withdrawn, it would mean worse hardship for those who most need a safety net and savings in bureaucracy and costs. If the amount was large enough for a “moderate lifestyle” it would increase Government expenditure and the well-off would get money that they hardly need, and so the arguments go. (In this context it is worth remembering that New Zealand already has a flat rate age pension paid to all citizens -currently around \$33000 \$NZ for a couple- and the sky has not fallen in). Leader of the NZ opposition Andrew Little said his Labour party was considering the UBI idea as part of proposals to combat the “possibility of higher structural unemployment”.

ECONOMISTS VIEWS AND BENEFITS FOR WOMEN

Economists are divided of course. Similar schemes were proposed long ago by Milton Friedman, the free-market economist who inspired much of Margaret Thatcher’s programme. Support from the right is based on expediency and efficacy. Their aim would be less expenditure, so any basic income supported by the right would, I imagine, be very basic indeed

Left economists such as Joseph Stiglitz have lent support for basic income, although he stresses there must be an adequate safety net for those in most need. *It's an idea we want to look at. Child benefit was a form of basic income so it's not something that I would rule out,* Stiglitz said. He is not alone in this view and there is political support from the left for a scheme which would provide a living wage for all.

The potential benefits for women-particularly those not in the paid workforce—many of whom have no financial independence and who would have greater economic security and all the freedoms which economic independence brings, have not been paramount in the debate. I think that there may be benefits for women and that UBI might redress gender inequality in some way.

There are some obvious difficulties ahead but undoubtedly the UBI debate will touch Australia.

It may well be a topic of debate at the next Federal Election in 4 years time .

CALLS FOR HOMELESSNESS TO BE A PRIORITY ISSUE**by Carmen Green**

More than 100,000 Australians are currently homeless and the numbers are rising. They include families, women with children fleeing domestic violence, and people who can no longer sustain private rental because it's getting so expensive. 40% of people who are homeless are under the age of 25. In our wealthy country, this is a national shame!

Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) has urged its members to support the #Votehome campaign which is led by an alliance of Homelessness Australia and National Shelter. The aim of the Alliance is to get major parties to commit to a national strategy to end the housing crisis by 2025. ERA's promotion of #VoteHome was done through social media and email to member organisations such as the UAW and the NCWA. ERA also used the platform as an opportunity to discuss women's housing issues in the lead up to the election.

Vote Home: Let's end the housing crisis by 2025 is a change.org movement with about 4000 supporters. There are also accompanying petitions on negative gearing and halving homelessness.

UAW members should join the movement by signing the petition and circulating it to friends. See: <https://www.change.org/m/vote-home-let-s-end-the-housing-crisis-by-2025>

National Council of Women Victoria Meeting - June 2016: Two speakers from WPI (Women's Property Initiatives) –Caroline Larcher and Kristie Looney gave an interesting overview of this very important organisation. WPI was established in 1996 through a project funded by the Victorian State Government in response to a lack of affordable, appropriate and secure housing for low income single women and single mothers.

WPI currently has a housing portfolio of 68 houses and apartments located in several Melbourne suburbs worth over \$20 million. They continue to provide housing for underprivileged women and children and currently house just under 200 tenants. They charge below market rent (no more than 75% of market rent or 30% of household income). The housing chosen must meet the standards set by WPI for suitable housing for the women who will live there. They also have a shared equity housing model whereby women with some savings can be assisted by WPI to buy a house with both having equity. They have also developed a real estate agency the profits of which go back to WPI to purchase additional housing for the many women and children on their waiting list. They are also hoping to get funding from the Andrew's Government's additional \$50 m to house women fleeing from domestic violence in Victoria. They are certainly an innovative organisation. ERA has promoted WPI on its website as providing a suitable model for the campaign across Australia to end the housing crisis by 2025.

By the time UAW members read this article, the Federal Election will have been held and the results known. Tragically, the many calls for homelessness to be made a priority issue in the Federal Election campaign were almost entirely ignored by Australia's political parties. So the campaign to make our politicians take notice of this issue will need to continue until the Federal Government is forced to take action.

In the immediate future, homelessness service providers need increased funding and future certainty of both state and federal funding arrangements and the Federal Government must determine to end the housing crisis by committing to continuing investment in social housing.

REAL RECOGNITION: Indigenous people and the Constitution by Anne Sgro

Recognition, and what form it may take, is a work in progress. Professors Megan Davis and Marcia Langton discussed this and related matters on a recent Wheeler Centre panel. Recognition can be many things along a spectrum from acknowledgement to a treaty. It is there in various native title recognitions, in Mabo – but here we are talking about Constitutional Recognition. Initial widespread public support has drifted and the work of the Expert Panel, which made its report in 2012, has seen no response. Both speakers felt that neither side of politics is honest enough to say what they think. The government has set up a tax-payer funded campaign for a YES case for the planned 2017 referendum, but without a model. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are suspicious: “What are we voting on?” In Victoria, a formal discussion on a treaty (or treaties) is under way, independent of the recognition debate. Across the country, starting in Broome, indigenous conferences are about to debate both issues. Geoff Scott, leader of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples, stated in regards to a treaty “There needs to be a relationship first off, leading to a treaty. How can you have recognition in this country if the government won’t have a relationship with the people they are trying to recognize?” (Age 15.5.2016)

Both speakers emphasized that it is very difficult to alter the constitution. As Langton explained, Parkes proposed Federation because the colonies became unworkable and “it all went through the Home Office – no women were involved, no Chinese, no Indians, no Aborigines. Only white men had a say.” A Preamble? Constitutional conservatives don’t want any Bill of Rights element. Section 51.26 gives parliament the power to make laws that affect a particular race. Before the 1967 referendum laws couldn’t be made for Aborigines because they were excluded, not even counted in the census. People had believed that such laws would be made for the benefit of indigenous people, but the High Court decision in the Hindmarsh Island Bridge case showed that is not actually the case. Can the race power be replaced by a positive power consistent with international law? Davis is convinced that “there are people who are nervous about getting rid of the section because they want it to deal with Muslims and asylum seekers.”

The chairperson referred to **“It’s Our Country”**, edited by Davis and Langton – 17 essays by indigenous thinkers presenting many ideas. She referred to anxiety among the authors about the possible failure of a referendum. Davis stated that change has come from activism, “not from the goodness of Parliament’s Heart,” and it could well be that, after extensive consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, the consensus is that they don’t want a referendum. A major issue is the lack of knowledge among Australians as to the real history of white invasion. The last words go to Langton: “The debate in Australia is so dumb about race. We’ve got to continue to educate people. We have been here for 70,000 years. There has been a lack of honesty, a lack of courage.”

I’ve just read Stan Grant’s **“Talking to My Country”**. It’s an incredibly moving must read, giving insight into systemic racism, poverty and alienation. From Part Nine: “Government policies have ranged from protection – preparing the passing of a race apparently destined for extinction – to segregation to assimilation to integration to self determination. We fight still to be recognized in the Australian Constitution that has allowed laws to take away children; invade our houses and violate our privacy.

In so many ways this country has told us we don’t belong. If we hear it often enough we believe it.” (Page 210)

And, talking of his children: “I have told them they live in a world where we have not made the rules so we need to be better at playing the game.” (Page 211) Get both books from the library.

Google Stan Grant’s speech on Racism and the Australian Dream.

We need education, public discussion, to listen to indigenous voices.

SOME ISSUES DEMANDING ACTION

SDA agreement with supermarkets By Morag Loh

The Age on June 6 (*Insight p 28*) featured an article both highly informative and highly disturbing. It told how a union, the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association (the SDA) had connived with at least three of Australia's largest employers, Coles, Woolworths and McDonalds, to pay tens of thousands of workers well below the minimum wage, indeed up to one third below in the case of McDonalds. The SDA has, in addition, paid these employers to deduct workers' union membership fees from their wages, enabling the union to maintain a strong voice in ALP policy. This voice advocates a very conservative social agenda, including opposition to abortion law reform and marriage equality.

Like many UAW members I have been an active unionist all of my working life and have served as a delegate and office bearer at local and state level. It was considered 'the norm' that my peers and I would strive to achieve the best possible conditions for our fellow workers who had elected us to our positions. Therefore I was astounded to read that Dave Oliver, secretary of the ACTU supported the SDA's deals with Coles. It seemed preposterous that while the ACTU was campaigning to protect penalty rates it was also backing a union that did deals to cut them or remove them entirely with little if any compensation for large numbers of workers. It was heartening however, to learn that 'the meatworkers' union' had backed the Fair Work Commission's intervention in the SDA case. I remember the AMIEU fondly from the 1960s for its support for equal pay and was glad that it seemed to be operating still according to 'the norm' and acting to obtain redress for some of the country's most vulnerable workers – young people, newly arrived immigrants and women.

To what extent does Dave Oliver's support for the SDA represent opinion within the labour movement's peak body? I phoned the ACTU office to express my concern and sent an email to Ged Kearney, the ACTU president. A polite, questioning phone call to the ACTU at 9664 7333 costs 20 cents and takes just a minute or two of one's time. A short email to Ged Kearney via her assistant at pneedham@actu.org.au takes only a little longer. We must not remain silent on this issue.

I have received the following reply from Dave Oliver. It speaks for itself.

Dear Morag,

Thank you for taking the time to get in touch. It's always good to hear from a staunch unionist. Ged Kearney passed along your letter and raised your concerns to me directly. While my comments appear to have been construed as defending the Coles EBA, I actually said any enterprise agreement must ensure workers are better off overall. There were three major parties involved in negotiating and then approving this agreement – the SDA, Coles and the Fair Work Commission.

In this case the SDA has bargained in good faith to get as good an outcome as they thought they could for workers at Coles. This agreement was approved by the majority of Coles workers who voted in the democratic workplace process. We have subsequently learned that, unfortunately, the agreement didn't make all the Coles workers better off overall.

Fortunately, thanks to the safeguards demanded by workers in their unions, our system puts every agreement to be tested by the Fair Work Commission who ensure workers are better off overall. If a worker thinks the Fair Work Commission got that test wrong they can appeal the approval. That's exactly what happened in this case. There is now an opportunity for the parties to fix the agreement. Coles needs to step up and make the changes the Fair Work Commission has said need to be made to ensure that all Coles workers are better off.

I certainly hope that Coles does the right thing, makes the improvements and pays their workers properly.

In unity, Dave Oliver

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SDA agreements*Cont'd from Page 7*

The UAW has also written to Ged Kearney, pointing out that, in fact, *the deal was exposed by an individual from another union*. We have not, as yet, received a reply. (Ed)

Also in the news was a report that a Taiwanese firm, working within conditions of the Free Trade Agreement, had brought to New South Wales its own workers, who were employed as welders for very much less than Australians would earn and, apparently, without full understanding of safety requirements. When the Free Trade Agreement was completed it was not available for public inspection. Perhaps we should ask to see it. We should ask our local Federal MPs if that is possible and if not why not.

Having A Say On End Of Life Issues by Anne Sgro

Ten months ago the Victorian government agreed to appoint a parliamentary committee of inquiry to examine whether the law should be changed to allow terminally ill people suffering severe pain to choose the time and means of their death. The government's decision came after a long campaign by concerned citizens, particularly members of Dying With Dignity Victoria who lobbied, held meetings, demonstrations and workshops, wrote and published articles and letters and offered counselling services, working at local, national and international levels.

To hold an inquiry was in line with public opinion; surveys indicated that at least eighty per cent of Victorians supported physician assisted death and over a hundred witnesses, including terminally ill people, lawyers, doctors and thoughtful citizens gave evidence to the inquiry.

The inquiry has recommended that the request for assisted death must come directly from the patient and must be approved by two doctors. The patient must be over 18 and mentally capable of making an informed request. In addition the patient must make the request about three times: the request must not be taken hastily. There are also safeguards to prevent pressure on the patient from self-interested relatives. The state government has six months to respond to the inquiry's proposals and if they become law, there will be a further eighteen month adjustment period. There has been a determination to accommodate varying opinions and beliefs and give people time to consider views other than their own.

The Inquiry's proposals are important because they give the patient the right to say when and how she should die. Patient wishes will be central to what happens. This is a great and welcome step away from tradition. There are, however, marked limitations. Only physical pain will be considered. You cannot ask that, should you become incapacitated by dementia, you get help to die. A request for assistance written into an advance care directive would not be considered. Many people therefore will not be helped.

In *The Age*, June 12, page 29, Rodney Syme tells of those who, having to solve their problems themselves, often meet sad, lonely and brutal ends. He contrasts their fates with those able to obtain Nembutal and end their days peacefully, if illegally. The story of people who seek to choose when and how they die still has some time to run.

A Voice From The USA by Anne Sgro

I was half watching a TV program on the US elections the other night (whether SBS or ABC I cannot remember) when Senator Bernie Sanders caught my attention. He was explaining why he would continue to campaign to obtain the Democratic Party's nomination to stand for president of the USA even though Hilary Clinton already had the numbers to win. He was working, he explained not so much for the nomination as to build a people's movement to achieve profound change. He declared that the USA was governed by and for the wealthy and how dreadful it was that in the world's richest country millions of working people could not afford to feed their children adequately, millions more were homeless or unable to afford medical care and others lived in third world conditions. A commentator noted that he had 'an amazing following of young voters' but did not seem interested in talking to any of them. I felt that perhaps a new force might be emerging in the USA. What Sanders had to say applied equally to Australia and one of the hopeful developments here has been growing strength of GetUp and the participation of young people in environmental organisations, particularly young women.

Is it time for optimism?

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*Newsletter published by UNION OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN (Vic)
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