

Union of Australian Women(Vic.)

Newsletter

WHAT'S ON-MAY 2016

Wednesday 4 May

Safe Steps Candlelight Vigil- to commemorate Women killed by Family Violence. Fed.Square. 5.45

**Wednesday 11 May
10.30 – 12.30**

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

**Thursday 12 May
10.30 – 12.30**

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

**16 May – 3 June
10.00 – 5.00 daily**

**HER PLACE Women's Museum Pop Up Exhibition
Melbourne Town Hall Room
Cnr Swanston and Little Collins Sts
Full details: www.herplacemuseum.com**

**Thursday 19 May
11.00 – 2.00**

**UAW-Seniors Network
Meeting room 4.2, 4th floor Ross House**

Monday 23 May

**UAW visit to Geelong Art Gallery and Library
'Land of the Golden Fleece – Arthur Streeton in the Western District' Entry \$13
Catch 10.50 train at Southern Cross Station.
Meet waiting room 10.30
Return 15.07/15.24**

JUNE

Let's celebrate the start of winter and warm ourselves up with a Pub Lunch!

**Wednesday 1 June
12 noon**

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

WOMEN – CALL TO ACTION**By Carmen Green**

The National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW) has prepared a draft statement (see below) on the upcoming budget to be sent to national political leaders. Members of ERA (Equality Rights Alliance) were forwarded the draft statement and were asked to contact the NFAW if they were prepared to support the statement.

ERA noted that the statement was consistent with their aim to achieve gendered budgeting as a precursor to the adoption of gender policy development across government. The UAW was delighted to support the pre-budget women's statement targeting as it does the needs of women suffering from various forms of disadvantage.

Entrenched bias against women and children must stop

In this Budget, this Election and all public policy

[A number of] organisations, representing [many] women, have called on warring political leaders in the run-up to the Budget, and to an election, to put an end to entrenched bias against women and children.

"Election 2013, and the following Budget, saw promises made that were not kept, and policies never previously mentioned introduced which were heavy blows to women and children" said Dr Mary Crawford, President of the National Foundation for Australian Women.

"The organisations making this call to political leaders speak for a wide range of women, especially women in disadvantage.

"There are women in Pacific Island nations, depending on Australian aid to give birth to healthy babies, and to educate those children.

"There are women in Australian cities and country towns fleeing domestic violence with their children- they need access to supported affordable housing, to community legal services.

"There are mature women retiring with grossly inadequate retirement incomes, unable to afford rents in our towns and cities.

"There are women and children needing access to health care, to dental care, to affordable medicines.

"There are working women still unable to find affordable decent care after school and in school holidays for their children, women who are still facing the loss of weekend penalty rates if they work in retail and hospitality, women struggling to keep their families housed fed and clothed.

"There are teenage girls needing access to affordable technical training run by reputable training institutions."

"Our organisations know women; know the needs of women and their children. We plead on their behalf.

"Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Leader of the Australian Greens. Now is the time to put an end to entrenched bias against women and children in this Budget, this election and public policies."

HAPPY BIRTHDAY NANCYE SMITH!

Congratulations to UAW member Nancye Smith, who celebrated her 90th birthday with family and friends in late April. While not a foundation member as such, Nancye was present, with her mother Edith Taylor, at the first meetings. She became more involved later, after she was forced to resign from nursing on her marriage. She comes from a long line of activists and feminists: both her grandmother and mother took part in the great Suffragette Rally in London in 1908, and Nancye has been committed to campaigning for women and for peace and social justice all her life. Best wishes, Nancy for many more years ahead.

SOUTHERN BRANCH REPORT APRIL 2016**by Mairi Neil**

On Saturday, April 23, a dozen of us met at Mordialloc Neighbourhood House, to hear our guest speaker, Stefanie Perri, the Labor Candidate for Chisholm. Stefanie talked about her journey to preselection for the seat of retiring Federal member Anna Burke.

Stefanie is the daughter of Italian migrants who settled in Clayton in the 1960s. Stefanie still lives there with a supportive husband and two young children.

At university Stefanie became involved in politics and joined the Labor Party. She has served on Monash Council for 7 years and is currently into her second term as Mayor. She has worked for Anna Burke and State member Ann Barker, is on a local hospital consumer liaison committee, on the board of a Refugee Women's Coalition Committee and involved with Rotary. Her council activism began when she worked to save Oakleigh Pool and she realised she could be a strong advocate for community. Her motivation to run for public office is a belief she can make a difference to peoples' lives for the better.

As a councillor she set up the Women's Business Network. She is an active board member of the Eastern Innovation Business Centre drawing on her expertise as an independent communication consultant. A project she started to stop violence against women and children was uncommon at the time for local government. Then Vic Health devised a program to work on that issue with local government and Monash was funded because they demonstrated their ability to work in that space.

Progress may be slow, but Stefanie is driven to make a difference. She works closely with and for Anna Burke, who is not the stereotypical politician. Stefanie considers Anna a benchmark for becoming an exceptional MP. She has learnt a lot from her and is glad Anna supports her campaign.

Stefanie's big issue is the government's gutting of hospital funding. Health is an important key issue for the electorate but also personal for Stefanie. Her son was in intensive care for 60 days when born. Education funding is another key issue. The Gonski reforms were not supposed to be party political. It is funding according to need and Stefanie gave an example of a school for children with disabilities that will lose \$2million if there is no Gonski.

Higher education is another area where the current government has let community down. Stefanie related a sad story of a young person questioning the value of tertiary education - is it worth going? She is appalled because in her university days no one questioned the value of education, but now young people who will be hampered for life with \$100,000 HEC debts do.

Of course, many young people know that huge HEC debts make it almost impossible to break into the housing market and housing affordability is another key issue people want to bring to Stefanie's attention. Young people, their parents and grandparents are concerned!

Job security, employment and small business are all concerns too. Stefanie mentioned the value of the Innovation Hub in Mulgrave that Simon Crean pushed to get built in the eastern suburbs. A Labor government has always focused on economic growth and job creation by investing in education and skills training, stimulating innovation and encouraging entrepreneurship.

There is grave concern about the power of developers and the over development in the suburbs that has stripped areas of backyards and green open spaces. Stefanie has a vision for the suburbs that includes the Green Wedge and housing where children still have room to play.

There must be proper management of growth and changes made to protect neighbourhood character.

Residential zones must be managed better so that young people are not outbid by developers. Units should not be dog boxes where parking is a problem and open space lost. She stands with Anna Burke and Labor for Refugees to have a more humane Asylum Seeker and Refugee policy. The meeting declared what a tragedy it was that Melissa Parkes and Anna Burke were not standing again because both have been outspoken advocates against mandatory offshore detention.

Stefanie is happy to work hard on this issue like Anna. Her husband is Syrian and he has family still in Syria. A cousin was recently tortured by the Syrian Government while his father was forced to watch the torture - and all because of a Facebook post. Another relative, a ten year old girl, was blown up crossing the road. Stefanie understands full well why people flee their country and seek asylum.

We had a lively question time covering many issues. The changes to Medicare are supposed to come into effect on July 1, the day before the election. Members asked how quickly Labor can repeal these changes if elected.

Will Labor restore the change to single mother's income - a cost saving measure the Gillard Government introduced, which has had devastating consequences. Unintentional the effects may have been, but they have happened and a Labor Government should reverse the cuts.

A general whinge occurred whenever Centrelink was mentioned - the meeting hoped that the government department will be radically improved under Labor and return to focussing on customer service. The rationalisation of Medicare offices was also a worry - not everyone is online or can cope with accessing information and payments online.

Concern was expressed about workers coming in under 457 visas who are taking jobs locals can do and that many dodgy schemes are being revealed where companies bring in overseas workers and treat them almost like slaves.

When there was discussion about developers it was mentioned that much of Kingston is flood prone therefore care should be taken covering large areas with concrete and forcing extra work on drains etc. Yet Kingston Council has designated 64% of land for unit development and less for stand-alone houses, the opposite ratio of Glen Eira and Bayside Councils.

The problem with drainage and flooding in Kingston is well documented yet VCAT keeps approving overdevelopment in flood prone areas. Stefanie was surprised and said that Monash Council reduced the amount of land cover to ease run off near creeks etc and this problem is within local council's means to fix.

The amount of issues and questions Stefanie covered and answered indicated that many areas overlap between local, state and federal government responsibilities. Just as well she has gained so much expertise in all fields with her life and work experience so far.

Discussion continued over a cup of tea and the social aspect of our get-togethers was very apparent. This was a successful and vibrant meeting although a few regular faces were missed. Our next meeting may be even more lively as the election campaign hots up or maybe we will be showing campaign fatigue because it is going to be a long exhausting 74 days! However, we will do what the UAW has always done and ensure our voice is heard. Good luck Stefanie!

CREATING HEATHY CITIES SUMMIT 2015**by Carmen Green**

Ms Birute Don attended the “Creating Healthy Cities Summit” on behalf of National Council of Women- Victoria. At the NCWV’s April meeting, Birute summarised the presentations by

- Richard de Cani , Managing Director-Planning Transport for London, on Transport Initiatives to reduce car travel in London and
- Professor Roz Hansen’s presentation to the Summit as Chair of the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Plan Melbourne Refresh.

De Cani said that London has policies in place that have influenced how people travel –increased public transport use and reduced car travel. London Transport promotes increased housing densities along rail lines to make public transport more viable, facilitate economic growth and improve the environment. Interestingly, given recent discussions in Melbourne, London has promoted car-free housing and workplaces in areas where other transport options are available. This helps to reduce traffic congestion in the streets, reduces air pollution, reduces road and housing infrastructure costs and helps alleviate climate change. London is also working on new railway projects worth billions of dollars and has paid for these public transport projects by imposing levies on businesses and new developments built close to the rail lines.

While Melbourne has now half the population of London in an area 5 times bigger, it’s population is expected to increase from about 4 to 8 million by 2051.

Professor Roz Hansen’s presentation “Putting People’s wellbeing first” spoke of the problems of cities and possible solutions. She said that:

- 63% of all Australian adults are overweight or obese.
- 57% of all Australian adults do not exercise for good health
- Australians are eating 30% less fruit and vegetables than 15 years ago
- Only 7% of Australians eat the daily recommended 5 servings of vegetables.

Professor Hansen said that changing lifestyles and the stress of everyday life are affecting our health and causing a rise in heart disease, diabetes, obesity & depression. Long commutes to work are stressful and leave less time for family, recreation and leisure.

She outlined 7 steps for putting people’s well-being first including getting the long term land use vision right , using infrastructure to deliver the vision and having a funding strategy. She said that you must have a plan for implementation and that Plan Melbourne 2014 has over 300 actions of which 80% are short term (0-4 years) to fit into the political cycle. Plan Melbourne also has a 10 year rolling implementation plan which is reviewed and consolidated every 5 years.

Professor Hansen believes that healthy cities start at the neighbourhood level. Her plan is to make areas so attractive that residents do not need to drive but can walk to shops, parks and work. By investing in making neighbourhoods more attractive we can reduce the cost of the health bill.

Birute gave a good summary of these two important papers in the short time available to her. It was encouraging to hear of the progress being made in London to make that city more liveable. Hopefully, Melbourne authorities will be inspired by London’s example and ensure that Professor Hansen’s healthy vision for Melbourne will be implemented over the next 10 years.

TIME TO TALK ABOUT HOUSING

Anne Sgro

After promising no restrictions for placing issues on the imaginary discussion table in regard to tax reform, the Coalition government has swept most proposals right off. And by refusing to make changes to negative gearing it not only misses out on billions of dollars in revenue but entrenches the unfair system that favours those with money against young potential first home buyers and those who are struggling in the private rental market.

The respected Grattan Institute reckons that *“the Commonwealth would raise an additional \$5 billion a year in tax if investment losses could not be deducted from labour income, and if tax was paid on 75% of capital gains rather than the current 50%.”* (The Age 26.4.16) Turnbull and Morrison laud the ‘mums and dads’ investors, whose desire for security and profit they do not wish to hinder, but what about the vast majority who are understanding that home ownership and security of tenure are way out of reach? Those favoured ‘mums and dads’, by the way, aren’t teachers, nurses, paramedics, etc. And for those who aren’t ‘mums and dads’? The young, the old, singles, women?

I read a small, general article in my local Leader this week about the Lord Mayor’s Charitable Foundation. It noted a recent Foundation report, ***Time of Our Lives?*** that was launched on International Women’s Day.

It shouldn’t have come as a surprise, because the UAW has long been aware of the work of Dr Andrea Sharam, Swinburne Institute, on housing and older women – *‘No Home at the End of the Road’* was published in 2011, firmly linking older women and homelessness. Catherine Brown, CEO of the Foundation, commissioned this latest research when she discovered in 2013, on reading a Productivity Commission report on disadvantage, that 34% of older women are living in long-term (10 years plus) income poverty in Australia – i.e. more than half a million.

She states on the web page *‘The report highlights the avalanche of risk factors and triggers that can lead one third of women to income poverty in old age.*

They relate to a combination of work issues and life events: low superannuation from having worked in casual and unpaid roles; higher divorce rates; higher survival rates for women than men – 38% of older women are widowed; increases in the costs of housing; and age discrimination in the workforce.

To find oneself at 65, 75, or 85 years of age living in insecure housing and unable to pay household bills and other expenses is not the quality of life any woman would aspire to. It is up to us all to do something about this...’ Catherine Brown refers to the ability of philanthropy to lead the way.

But I would see it as a question of social justice and the human right to a roof over one’s head - and an affordable, secure and decent roof at that. Which is why the Coalition needs to be denounced for continuing to support policies that discriminate against women, young people and the elderly.

Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) and COTA Victoria recently joined forces to hold a consultation forum on the issues of affordability and deteriorating housing options. The feedback will inform the development of an Older Person’s Housing Strategy. Older people are struggling to survive on the age pension and decreasing rates of home ownership have placed increasing numbers of older people at risk of homelessness in the private rental market.

Australia needs a housing policy at federal level. As citizens, we need government investment in public housing – the current waiting lists are scandalous. As a result of family violence, women and children are homeless.

We need a fair tax system. ‘...current tax arrangements are economically and socially damaging. They are too generous, require increases in other taxes that drag more on the economy, distort investment away from where it would add the most to national prosperity, reduce home ownership, and primarily help high-income earners. Spin and anecdote cannot obscure that it is time for change.’ (The Age 26.4.16)

It is time for strong housing policies. It is time to get rid of a government that blatantly supports the wealthy at the expense of the community.

TWO REPORTS FROM MELBOURNE’S WHEELER CENTRE by Anne Sgro

The Stella: acknowledging, supporting and celebrating Australian women writers.The Stella Prize is a major literary award celebrating Australian women’s writing, and championing diversity and cultural change. Named after Stella Maria Sara ‘Miles’ Franklin, the initial prize was awarded in 2013, and came about after a meeting of writers and others in early 2011 expressed concern about the underrepresentation of women on the literary pages of the major Australian newspapers, both as reviewers and authors of books reviewed; and about the underrepresentation of women as winners of literary prizes.

The winner for 2016 was Charlotte Wood: *The Natural Way of Things*. She joined writer Alice Pung (a 2016 judge) and shortlisted author Peggy Frew: *Hope Farm*, at a recent Wheeler Centre meeting. There were 170 entries, the judges chose their top 12. These two books were in the top 3 of all the lists. The criteria? The books had to be “excellent, engaging, original”.

Charlotte Wood made an impassioned plea for people to support the arts “We need art more than ever...” and to buy books. She stated that the average income for literary fiction writers is \$4,100, and the average income for all writers is \$12,500. “95% of all writers in Australia earn beneath the average wage for their work.” Arts funding has been continually slashed by the current government. Money taken from the Australia Council has not been returned and is now being pork-barrelled without given criteria. She stated that the Victorian Government is more generous. Writers are now asked to speak for free, with the Wheeler Centre being one of the few places where writers are actually paid. “As a society, we must give a shit about art” is how she put it.

As for diversity, it was agreed that “publishing is a very white industry. Alice Pung noted that books by black writers or those from diverse background are not getting published in Australia unless they are memoirs.

Jennifer Clement: poet, novelist, journalist and president of PEN International, has lived most of her life in Mexico. 2009 – 2012 she was president of PEN Mexico and her work focused on the disappearance and death of journalists. Her writing and activism represent a life-long commitment to honouring those silenced by gender, class and race. Her latest book *Prayers for the Stolen* is about the abduction of young girls in Mexico, how violence and the drug wars are affecting the most vulnerable women. Girls are being stolen from the country-side. Parents dig holes in the ground to hide them. Why a novel and not journalism? She noted the power of the novel to bring social change: *Oliver Twist* brought about change to child labour laws in England; *Germinal* helped cause modification of laws about migrants in France.

Why is there so much trafficking in girls? There is a transnational mafia, dealing in all kinds of crime – drugs, arms, money laundering, trafficking of people – women, labourers, doctors, engineers. Mexico is a lawless land, and without decisive action from the US there will be no change. She stated that 47% of all gun dealers in the US would be out of business if the market was stopped into Mexico, because guns come mainly from the US.

One hundred journalists have been killed in Mexico, four already this year. Many of them are women. PEN International's International Women's Day was devoted to female journalists because they receive the greater aggression.

Ms Clement would like to change the PEN International Charter to add gender and sexual orientation to race, class and religion. She wants to create a manifesto for gender. She thinks that violence against women would be seen as a form of censorship, and would like a system to monitor how many books by women are reviewed. 86% of reviews are of work written by men.

So let's keep supporting writers: buy books, borrow from and support libraries, support PEN, and demand that the arts be funded with generosity.

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