

Union of Australian Women(Vic.)

Newsletter

WHAT'S ON –SEPTEMBER 2016

Wednesday 7 September
Meet UAW office 11.00

Exhibition at Library at the Dock
Wharfies Support! Social Justice Activism from the
Melbourne Docks

Thursday 8 September
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Book Group
2nd floor meeting room Ross House

Until 11 September

The Ordinary Instant
Over 50 works of Clarice Beckett, plus works by
contemporary female artists
The Gallery @ BACC
Brighton Town Hall
Carpenter St Brighton

Wednesday 14 September
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Organising Committee
2nd floor meeting room Ross House

WEDNESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER - UAW COFFEE WITH A FOCUS
10.30 – 12.30 **4th floor meeting room Ross House**

Speaker: Lesley Wick President, Dying with Dignity Victoria

TOPIC: END OF LIFE CHOICES

See attached flyer invitation

OFFSHORE DETENTION: AUSTRALIA HAS LOST ITS MORAL COMPASS

by Anne Sgro

"Heads shall roll," thundered a stern Malcolm Turnbull recently. He wasn't, though, referring to the systemic abuse of asylum seekers in offshore detention centres. That would have been too much to expect.

Less than 24 hours after the ABC 4 Corners program screened footage of the abuse of indigenous youth in the Northern Territory justice system, the PM called for a Royal Commission, backed by overwhelming support from a shocked nation of viewers. Yet the latest evidence of the systematic abuse of asylum seekers on Nauru, particularly affecting women and children, has resulted in little concern. The release of 2,000 incident reports by Guardian Australia, was not new information. Despite the rigorous secrecy, we do know what is going on in our name. And most Australians do not seem to care – refugees have effectively been ostracized as 'the other' by both major parties.

So time for an energized campaign! The UAW has written to both Malcolm Turnbull :

The human cost of Australia's offshore detention program is immense. We can no longer hide behind secrecy and obfuscation. Please act now to bring the asylum seekers in Nauru's abusive detention camps to safety in Australia, and rethink the policy that traumatizes adults and children who seek safety and peace.

And to Bill Shorten:

Like many individuals and organisations, members of the Union of Australian Women Victoria are horrified, but not surprised, at the revelation of systematic abuse of asylum seekers on Nauru. The release last week by The Guardian of more than 2,000 incident reports outlining the many abuses in the Nauru detention centre adds to the information we already have despite the veil of secrecy. This is abuse on a horrifying scale, particularly since it pertains so much to children.

I understand that you are preparing to push for a Senate inquiry into offshore detention. Apart from the incident reports, there is already a firm record of systematic abuse and mistreatment – from refugees, the Australian Human Rights Commission, Amnesty International, and former staff. Is the proposed Senate inquiry a tactical first step in calling for a change in policy?

We believe that the ALP needs to show leadership and go further, ending offshore detention, bringing those traumatized people to Australia and co-operating with other countries in the region to find a humane, lasting solution. We are rightly shamed as a country by outspoken criticism from UK and New Zealand. Australians need to find again our moral compass. We hope that the Opposition can step up to the challenge.

We need to get going. Email, write, phone.

Malcolm.Turnbull.MP@aph.gov.au

Telephone: 02 6277 7700 or 02 9327 3988

Peter.dutton.mp@aph.gov.au

02 6277 7860

Bill.Shorten.MP@aph.gov.au

02 6277 4022

Or write to Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600

Many organisations are taking action, Check out the Victorian Women's Trust for ideas: www.ourvoicestheirsafety.com. A group of respected academics is urging a summit, and a compromise solution that includes turning back boats but closing offshore detention centres.

Australia's policy of mandatory offshore detention is immoral, abusive and illegal. But I think that we will need a concerted action to make the major parties shift their policies.

NEWSTART CUTS: THE UAW OBJECTS TO THE POOREST YET AGAIN CARRYING THE BURDEN OF "DEBT AND DEFICIT REDUCTION" Cath Morrison

As we are constantly admonished, we must cut debt and deficit as a high priority and Governments have to make tough choices...."how's this for one of the "tough choices" about fairness Turnbull wants our elected representatives to agree to in this year's budget: cutting the dole – which is a princely \$38 a day – and other welfare payments by \$4.40 a week, while agreeing to tax cuts of \$6 a week for people earning more than \$87,000 a year. (Ross Gittins, The Age, 24/8)

Labor looks likely to support this measure as part of the budget proposals although there are many in Labor suggesting it should be opposed. This is on top of the \$4 the recipients will lose in September 2016 when the Income Support Bonus disappears!

Many organisations are protesting against this cut and we have joined them in writing to the PM and to the Leader of the Opposition in the following terms.

"Re: Budget measure to remove the energy supplement (ES) for Newstart and other new pension recipients

The Union of Australian women (Vic) urge you to reconsider this budget measure on the grounds of fairness and humanity.

The Business Council of Australia has argued that Newstart's \$264/week is too low for people experiencing unemployment. Cutting the \$4.40/week energy supplement for all new welfare recipients means it is the poorest Australians who again shoulder the burden of 'budget savings'. Research shows that this new cut to welfare will mean couples experiencing unemployment will be on an income that puts them 32% below the poverty line. Single people already living on the brink will feel a \$4.40 week cut in income the most. Add to this the loss in September 2016 of the Income support Bonus of \$4 a week for a single pensioner and their situation will be dire. Children of the unemployed will suffer and go without even basic necessities. This measure will further marginalise the unemployed and cannot be justified in the context of generous tax concessions to those who are far better off. We join with ACOSS and many other organisations in this plea to your sense of a fair go and ask you to remove this particular budget cut from the Parliamentary agenda"

The whole question of the burden of public debt is built on a tissue of lies and of fostering the belief that our grandchildren will suffer if we continue to maintain/improve our sound welfare safety-net and continue to build much needed infrastructure.

Ross Gittins, writing in the Age (24/8) sets out a good case for public debt: *when politicians tell us the government owes many billions of dollars, many of us assume there's nothing to show for all that spending and borrowing. Which is just what game-playing politicians hope we'll assume. But it's usually not true. What do governments have to show for all their borrowing? Public infrastructure – roads and motorways, bridges, railways and bus fleets, hospitals and schools, prisons and police stations and all manner of other facilities. All those things contribute to our standard of living and to the efficiency of our economy. Do you think we'd be better off had the money not been borrowed and those things not been built? Since we worry about our children and grandchildren, what kind of physical Australia do we want them to inherit? One with rundown and inadequate public facilities – one where it's really hard to get around, where roads and trains and hospitals and schools are grossly overcrowded?*

Next time you hear about our terrible debt and deficit problem ask what we are getting for the debt and why only the poor have to make the really tough choices!

DISAFFECTION. VIEWS OF AN ANTI-POVERTY CAMPAIGNER

By Anne Sgro

What's not to like about August in Melbourne? There's the Melbourne International Film Festival and the Melbourne Writers Festival just for starters. Plenty of ideas to discuss and think about. If you can't actually turn up to an event, chances are you will hear interesting discussion on the ABC's Radio National.

Linda Tirado is the author of **Hand to Mouth. The truth about being poor in a wealthy world.** She was working 2 jobs – as a food service worker in a chain restaurant and as a voting rights activist at a non-profit organisation in the United States. I heard her speak at a function organised by the Queen Victoria Women's Centre. It was unusual to be in an audience where I was probably the oldest participant – most were young women with a sprinkling of young men. She had come to Australia with a crowdfunded ticket, and with the confidence of youth, wasn't sure how she'd get home.

How did America get to have Donald Trump as a presidential candidate? Contrary to public opinion, his supporters are middle-class retired folk, not the stereotyped Appalachian poor. The Democratic Convention suppressed opposition and she declared Hilary Clinton to be a perfect Republican candidate. So there is no place for progressive people to go. 78% of people in her age demographic – mid-30s – don't like either candidate and, as there is no alternative, they won't vote. She cites a climate of fear in the US because people don't know what will happen and neither do the politicians. 60% of Americans don't have a college degree, and while employment is slowly rising, it is casual work, maybe 15 hours per week, for \$7 an hour. So people are disaffected. And those who speak up, as she did, initially in an online contribution, have their personal lives attacked. Her background was called into question. She referred to the Norlane truck driver who asked a pertinent question on ABC's Q&A recently, and whose personal life was trashed by the Murdoch media for having the temerity to speak. *"The token poor person had better be perfect."* Therefore many people who are poor and uncertain are not willing to stand up. *"In America, we have gone into our own little tribes, living in a bubble of similar people."*

She sarcastically thanked Australia for Rupert Murdoch, and stated that the media is serving us poorly, driven as it is by consumerism and advertising.

She frequently referred to the similarities between the US and Australia, and is convinced that we are just 10 – 15 years behind. In her view, politics look strikingly familiar. We have:

Lifters and leaners in Australia

Makers and takers in the US

Strivers and skivers in the UK.

An older woman in the audience asked why Americans choose not to vote. Linda Tirado lives in a country where her age cohort is the biggest, yet the candidate is a baby boomer *"who hasn't driven her own car since 1996."* Young people can't buy houses; they can't get jobs. So it is hard to not be disaffected. She spoke of the dehumanization of being tear-gassed for protesting about police who shoot unarmed young people. People don't show up because the system has given them no reason to show up. But she urges people to act locally – with the local authority, the school board, etc.

Is there an organised work-force in America? There is a resurgence of the oppressed who state that *"We deserve better than this"*; and assert that *"We work hard in this service industry"*. But it didn't sound like unionized organisation.

While Linda Tirado pointed to many similarities between disaffection in the US and Australia, there are also many differences. Disaffection here took the form of rejecting many candidates from the 2 major parties. But it also elected Pauline Hanson and her team. We can be thankful that voting is compulsory. But we have certainly become more fearful, meaner and less caring as a society. Workers' conditions are under constant attack. The future for youth is more uncertain. But we do have a strong core of progressive activism and a determination for change.

WOMEN CONTINUE TO BE UNDER REPRESENTED IN THE AUSTRALIAN HONOURS SYSTEM

by Carmen Green

The speaker at the July meeting of the National Council of Women of Victoria was Jenny Standish who spoke on the Australian Honours System. Jenny Standish said that the honours give Australians role models to admire as well as recognising, celebrating and saying thank you to those who make a difference.

This year, the general division of the Order of Australia saw 519 new members appointed. Of these, 170 were women and 349 were men –twice as many men honoured as women. In the most prestigious category –the Companion of the Order of Australia –representation of women was even worse. Of the 8 Australians awarded this honour, only one was a woman.

However on a positive note, Jenny said that despite the overwhelming dominance of male nominees, more women are appointed from the number of female nominations than is the case for men. Eight out of 10 successful female applicants compared with a figure of seven out of 10 for men. There is, therefore, she said a need for greater numbers of women being nominated if we are to achieve greater representation of women in these awards. So the problem is partly that we don't nominate enough women.

Another factor deserving examination in relation to the low representation of women receiving honours is the fact that the Council for the Order of Australia which chooses who receives the honours comprises 14 men and 3 women. Isn't it also time to increase the number of women involved in making these important decisions?

In an article by Simon Elvery "Queen's Birthday Honours 2016: A celebration for Australian men and some women" (ABC News, 26 January 2016) Associate Professor Jane Maree Maher, Director of the Centre for Women's Studies and Gender Research at Monash University agreed that the root of the problem was societal due to "women's work" being less highly valued. She said that change would require action from those running the awards and that the Council would need to call for more nominations from women.

The article by Simon Elvery also quoted Anne Summers who had written an article critical of the secrecy surrounding the process and the fact that the public are not allowed to know what criteria are used to select awardees.

In another article by Lucia Osborne "Where are the women in the Order of Australia?"- Women's Agenda, 10 June 2015-the writer interviews women's rights and indigenous advocate, Merle Thornton who was inducted as a Member of the Order of Australia this year and who said "It is disappointing to see that again there are twice as many men as women, especially when the honours are by and large appointed for unpaid work, or for work outside of paid employment. You would expect women to be shining." Thornton thinks that the imbalance is partly a product of the nomination process and that we need to encourage the nomination of more women.

So in conclusion, the challenge for all of us –both individually and through our organisations- is to aim to nominate one outstanding woman every year for an honour and to also lobby the Federal Government (Department of PM and Cabinet) to ensure that the number of women on the Australia Council is increased to represent their percentage in the total population.

WOMENS HISTORICAL RECORDS IN VICTORIA -UPDATE

by Cath Morrison

Merger of Womens Heritage Victoria and HER PLACE

These two organisations have been working separately towards preserving women's historical records in Victoria in a permanent museum and exhibition space and linking all available records through a data base. Many institutions are no longer able to accept this archival material and there is a fear that these valuable resources will be lost to future researchers.

The two have now merged into one body at the urging of the Victorian State Government. A formal Memorandum of Understanding has been signed by both organisations and legal processes are underway to create a new combined organisation with an independent Chair. This is an excellent move forward for unity in this space and will only enhance the aim of obtaining significant funding from the Andrews' Government to achieve our joint goals. I have been a member of the Women's Heritage Steering Committee (WHCV) since its inception and see this merger as a positive and necessary outcome. We hope that an announcement on funding will be forthcoming once legal processes are finalised.

Women's Register- a link to women's records

For those who haven't come across it The Australian Women's Register is an invaluable on line resource for those researching women's role in Australian life and the location of existing records and archives. Nikki Henningham and Helen Morgan from the University of Melbourne (my fellow members of the WHCV Steering Committee -see above) are responsible, among others for the Register.

The Australian Women's Archives Project (AWAP) developed the Australian Women's Register (<http://www.womenaustralia.info/>) as a central part of its strategy to encourage the preservation of women's archival heritage and to make it more accessible to researchers. The Register is a central access point to information about Australian women and their achievements and provides access to material relating to women held in Australian cultural institutions as well as in private hands. The National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW) was instrumental in driving this project forward.

The searchable-on-line Women's Register is a valuable and growing source of biographical data about Australian women and their organisations, with searchable links to the libraries where their records are held and to other sources of information. Women and women's organisations are listed alphabetically. You'll also be able to search by functional classification, for example, 'P' covers physicists, politicians, pharmacists, pacifists and many more.

Records about women provide the basis of all the work of the [Australian Women's Archive Project](#). To ensure records are available in the future, AWAP promotes the keeping and care of personal records and encourages individuals and organisations to deposit records appropriately in available archives and libraries.

National institutions preserve the papers of prominent women and large organisations. But there are many smaller institutions with fascinating archival collections. For example the [Geelong City Council's](#) Heritage Centre (Vic) holds the records of local Girl Guides groups from the 1930s - 1960s. There are many more small and specialised collections. *(cont.next page)*

The Women's Register entry on the UAW provides a valuable resource for anyone interested in our history. I was pleased to be able to update the entry in the Register to reflect our current contact details.

UAW Archives

Although some members still have significant collections of papers in their keeping, the bulk of the UAW (Vic) archives are housed at Victoria University at the Footscray Campus. The collection comprises 17 archive boxes, 28 pamphlet boxes, as well as photographs.

According to the Victoria University website (<http://library.vu.edu.au/record=b1246206>) the boxes are organised into 8 main groups:

1. UAW Committees (National & State) –
2. Correspondence
3. Conferences
4. UAW publications
5. UAW campaigns, activities, areas of interest
6. History of UAW
7. Biography of members
8. Research information

Carol Stals, one of our UAW members, has made a great effort in recent years sorting out UAW documents such as minutes and correspondence and sending them off to Victoria University for archival filing and safekeeping.

Victoria University also houses the **Ruth Crow papers**. During fifty years of political and social activism in Melbourne, Ruth Crow A.M. (1916 - 1999) and Maurie Crow (1915 - 1988) provided a rich trove of records of their work in Melbourne. This collection is an historical resource for the wide variety of causes they championed- women and children in Brunswick during WWII and pioneering work they did from the 1960's onwards in relation to public participation in urban planning, building neighbourhood communities and creating a sustainable future.

Another early UAW member and activist **Marj.Oke's** papers are preserved at the University of Melbourne

It is so important to ensure that women's records are preserved. What is not preserved ceases to exist and the role of women has so often been wiped from the record of history. There is great support among women's organisations for a Victorian Women's Museum and Archive and it will be a great day when this is finally achieved in Melbourne.

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Vale Shirley Taylor. We were saddened to hear of the death of long time UAW member Shirley Taylor after a sudden illness. She is remembered by her daughter Erica as a terrific networker, a wonderful mentor and a community activist.

Poem from a refugee

*No one leaves home unless
Home is the mouth of a shark.
You only run for the border
When you see the whole city
Running as well.*

Warsan Shire (Somali-British poet)

(Courtesy of the Grandmothers)

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