

Union of Australian Women(Vic.)

Newsletter

WHAT'S ON- APRIL

Sunday 9 April
2.00pm

Walk for Justice for Refugees
Palm Sunday Rally
State Library
Cnr Swanston & LaTrobe Sts

Progress on the resettlement of asylum seekers seems to have stalled. Men, women and children are now spending a fourth year in detention on Manus and Nauru without any hope for the future. The UAW is one of more than 110 organisations that have endorsed the rally.

Grandmothers are gathering in a sea of purple on the front steps.

Wednesday 12 April
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Organising Committee
3rd floor meeting room, 3.2 Ross House

Thursday 13 April
1.00 – 3.00

UAW Book Group
2nd floor meeting room Ross House

Wednesday 3 May

UAW excursion to the Bendigo Art Gallery
Collective Vision: 130 years
Meet Southern Cross waiting room for 10.14 train
(arrives 12.04). Return 2.56 arrives 5.05

VALE MARY OWEN

Mary died 23 March aged 96. She was an amazing woman, active and committed to social justice and the advancement of women up until the end. She was honoured for years by her peers through the Mary Owen Dinner : she was co-ordinator of the Working Women's Centre in the 70s, campaigned for a women's archive, she worked on retirement funding, recognised the contribution of others, and was kind and caring .

THE POWER OF WOMEN'S FRIENDSHIP

By Anne Sgro

Vera Hunt and I attended the Molly Hadfield Social Justice Oration as friends of Molly and as members of the UAW. Well done Darebin Council for organizing the Oration for International Women's Day as "a way to recognize Molly Hadfield's work but also a proactive way of exploring social justice issues that impact and interest women in our community." The young mayor, Kim Le Cerf (Greens), gave a moving tribute to Molly as she spoke to the theme for International Women's Day: "Be Bold for Change".

Carmen Green's article on Clementine Ford (March Newsletter) was a fine introduction to the guest speaker who, when acknowledging the traditional owners, pointed out that "*words can be powerful, but can also just be words*" if not followed by action. She spoke about the continued oppression behind the language of acknowledging indigenous people, and spoke of other marginalized women. She pointed out that Molly had championed older women, the elders in our communities, who are also the fastest growing group of homeless women.

We need to celebrate female friendships – they are essential to our strength and our well-being. We need to talk about friendship among women and the importance of friends in our lives. That made me think of the importance of the UAW in my life, and the pleasure and power of like-minded women acting together. Clementine criticized Hollywood's portrayal of women, asserting that protagonists are too often between 18 – 32, beautiful and white. Films about women rarely happen because there is little female involvement in film and the pop culture is male. The default is men, the Other is women; the default is able-bodied, the Other is disabled...The film Tangled is not Rapunzel.

Friendship and social justice – what is the connection? "*There is only a certain amount of space in the room for women. Men will not move over!*" Merit becomes the issue when there is suggestion of quotas – for political party pre-selection, for example, or for positions on boards, etc. No-one questions the merit of men, who don't have to do much to be accepted as worthy of a position. She made us all laugh when she reminded us that Tony Abbott had considered himself a feminist on the basis that he liked his wife and daughter - then declared himself Minister for Women and appointed only one woman in a Cabinet of twenty Ministers. She asked us to imagine the furore if Julia Gillard had done the same, and had appointed one man and nineteen women. Men have always had power and have been socialized to protect one another: 'the boys' club', 'boys will be boys'. Men are shielded from scrutiny after rape, etc. There is a notion that women will destabilize things. She was scathing about the men in the US who voted for Trump after Bernie Sanders was knocked out of the race because they couldn't vote for a woman. They feared that, if elected, Hillary Clinton would have looked after women before men. I actually think that the question of Hillary Clinton was rather more complicated than that but there was certainly high levels of misogyny.

Clementine indicated that she had been abused on-line by men after publication of her article on Wicked Camper Vans (See Carmen's article). Her experience was reflected two days later in an article by Greens Senator Janet Rice, who had been counting bike-riders in the annual Bicycle Network's annual Super Tuesday bike count (Age 10.3.17). Conditions on roads were dangerous, so many fewer women rode – in Melbourne 73% of bicycle commuters are men. Bicycle Network states that "*the higher the ratio of women commuting by bike, the better the bike infrastructure.*" Yet Janet Rice received hundreds of comments, mostly from men, on International Women's Day that not only disputed the importance of her findings, but were personally abusive. They suggested various ways she could kill herself, was told to get back in the kitchen, called a sexist pig, and told to knock herself out. Why? For suggesting that "*the easier and safer we make it for people to ride, the closer to equality we get.*"

The Power of Women's Friendships (contD. from page 2)

In Clementine's opinion, we must have people around us who implicitly understand. We are not obliged to convince men that our lives are real. And the best way is to surround ourselves with like-minded women. She referred in some detail to the 70s Australian film *Puberty Blues* which depicted a world where the boy is king – girls sit around on the beach and watch the action. I have not seen the film and her description of the accepted sexual abuse of one of the girl characters was confronting, but ended on the hopeful note of the female solidarity of two other girls who vowed to support and protect each other in the face of male sexual violence. She asked: "What has really changed in the last forty years?" How can we read the frequent reports of men sharing on-line film of the sexual abuse of women without being confronted with deep levels of misogyny? Why try to be a WAG to enter the football world? How can we say that much has changed?

Women have always worked together. They give refuge to others who need it most. Women are strong. The value of friendship is immense. **"We are the future and the future might as well start today."**

In response to questions and comments, Clementine believed that Hillary Clinton had the qualifications but lost to someone who spends his presidency tweeting. She fears that there will not be another female Prime Minister in Australia for a very long time.

Female traffic light signs? There is a trial of lights at the intersection of Flinders and Swanston Streets is an attempt to reduce unconscious bias. The money used to change some walk/don't walk signs that depict women rather than the 'little man' shape could have been used for women's health BUT representation does matter as well, visibility matters, and someone is trying to do the right thing. It was mainly men who saw it as a waste of money. Concluding, she believes that the women's movement needs to aim for total liberation. We must all work to dismantle systems that oppress.

I think that Molly would have been pleased by the evening that saluted her contributions to women and social justice. Northcote Town Hall was ablaze with red and purple, and filled with women (and some men) of all ages, but overwhelmingly young.

EQUALITY IS A "PROFOUNDLY CONSERVATIVE GOAL": GERMAINE GREER

By Anne Sgro

Germaine Greer, speaking at the launch of her archive at the University of Melbourne on International Women's Day, stated that women want more than simply drawing level with men. Reported in the Guardian, (9.3.17) she stated that *"equality feminism...will change nothing. War is made against civilian populations where women and children are the principal casualties in places like Syria, whether in collapsing buildings or bombed schools. War is now completely made by the rich with their extraordinary killing machines, killing the poor who have no comeback."*

If we're going to change things I think we're going to have to start creating a women's polity that is strong, that has its own way of operating, that makes contact with women in places like Syria, and that challenges the right of destructive nations."

One of the aims of the women's movement in the 70s, as I recall, was that while we did want equity we did not want the kind of lives that most men had. We wanted a kinder, different society that valued all its members. We wanted a fairer, different way of life.

Germaine Greer's visit and speech were not widely reported in the Australian media. Not for the first time.

EQUAL PAY – OR IS IT PAY EQUITY?

By Anne Sgro

On International Women's Day I was asked to speak at a union rally for equal pay. United Voice, the union that covers early childhood educators, had called a stop work precisely on IWD and women and men from three local centres were converging on Brunswick Town Hall before moving on to a wider rally. Those who stopped work were in the not-for-profit sector. I was probably asked to speak because of my involvement 40 years ago in the establishment of a work-related centre that had involved unions, workers, community and local council. Our aim was for quality, affordable, not-for-profit childcare. But we also wanted recognition and respect for the workers. The marchers could be heard from a distance -drums, chants, and when they came into view, cheerful turquoise balloons floated above. They were demanding equal pay, but my interpretation of that was really 'pay equity'. As a teacher in the 1960s, I was paid less than men with exactly the same qualifications and experience – simply because I was female. It took a long struggle for my union to gain equal pay, which began in the early 70s, after I had resigned to have children – no suitable childcare available in Coburg then.

But what we have here is something a little different, I think. Australia has the most gendered workforce in all the OECD countries. What is seen as 'men's' work and 'women's work' are different and remunerated accordingly. Caring jobs are seen as 'women's work' and not valued, it's as simple as that. Yet it makes no sense: apart from fairness, the economy benefits from the engagement of women. A recent OECD report states: *"Australia's relatively high child care costs are one important factor contributing to the high 'not in employment, education or training' rates among young mothers with young children."* *The OECD's 35 members comprise most of the world's leading economies. Australia ranks in the lowest third of OECD nations for female employment.* (Age 13.3.17) Early childhood educators work with children – they are paid a measly \$20 an hour! A couple of dollars above the minimum wage! Yet these are the people whom we trust to look after our children – nurture them, encourage them, teach them, socialize them. Paid slightly more than workers who wash dishes, do unskilled work (to not in any way denigrate those workers).

High quality childcare is vital. As a recent writer to the Age said "This should translate to a high value being placed on early childhood educators." Yet these trained, dedicated, hardworking educators are undervalued and grossly underpaid. It is outrageous. When, I wonder, will our politicians and policy makers take themselves to Scandinavia and northern Europe to see how it can be done? The recent changes to child care rebates helps some families, but doesn't assist those who are unemployed or not in training. All children should be able to access programs and support. When will they understand that spending on early childhood learning for all children will benefit society as a whole and will pay off at the other end, with possibly less need to build more juvenile detention centres? When will this work be valued? Good luck to the early childhood educators – it will be a long campaign.

ANOTHER GOOD WOMAN RESIGNS FROM POLITICS.

I was sorry to learn that Kate Ellis had decided to resign from politics, though understood perfectly why she did. As with former Attorney General in the Gillard government, Nicola Roxon, we will be losing a clever, capable woman who could have become a leader. The system is inherently flawed. Young women are required to overcome difficulties and make choices that are just not confronted by men, and we are all worse off as a result.

This is one example of why 70s feminists wanted change. How to change it? I'm not sure, but it can't be that hard.

**UAW INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION 2017 SPEAKER CLAIRE SAXBY
Fran Mackieson****Report by**

The president, Anne Sgro, welcomed members to our UAW International Women's Day meeting for 2017. Anne reminded us of the many achievements that women have made and the challenges that still lie ahead. A cause for celebration is the recent appointment of the new secretary to the ACTU, Sally McManus. The fact that both the president and secretary are women will mean that they will stand up for workers in a way that is much more accessible to the broader community.

Anne continued saying we have opted for cheerfulness and good stories for this IWD celebration. The speaker, Claire Saxby, is a writer of fiction, non-fiction and poetry for children. The book we are particularly interested in is *My Name Is Lizzie Flynn*. A number of us were teachers in the 1970's and 1980's and we campaigned and worked for recognition of girls in stories as protagonists and the establishment of Equal Opportunity Resource Centres. These flourished in the 70's and 80's and brought lots of material and ideas to teachers in schools. The active protagonists in many books were boys and girls did not see themselves in this role. We were able to change this around quite a lot.

Anne then welcomed and introduced Claire and also Margaret Rolfe, a quilt historian. Through her writing Claire explores the role of gender, history, and the power of stories. The Rajah Quilt, made by convict women, the subject of Claire's most recent book, was exhibited in Federation Square late 2016.

Claire explains how she was shown a picture of the Rajah quilt, which she found fascinating and decided to do more research. This led to a meeting with her publisher and the writing of the book: *My Name Is Lizzie Flynn*. It is a picture story book of 32 pages with large colourful illustrations.

Claire reads the story to the audience, and then explains the background to the story. She then poses the question: Why this story?

-This one of Australia's most important textiles. The Rajah Quilt is the only known surviving quilt from the period that was made as a consequence of the "useful bag" that were given out to women aboard these convict ships.

-It is an amazing story and it has two threads. Every stitch has an individual story. The quilt is 10 ½ feet by 11 feet; so is more a coverlet.

The Rajah was a small cargo ship captained by a young Charles Ferguson. Aboard ship were one hundred and eighty women, ranging in age from 13 to 70 and ten children. Children were not counted till they were 7 and after that they could be tried as equals in an adult court. There was a 23 year old matron, Kezia Hater, who had worked with Elizabeth Fry, the Quaker social reformer, in London's women's prisons. She had a brief to come out to Australia with this cargo of women and to assess the state of the female factory in Van Dieman's Land. There was a surgeon, three paying passengers and approximately 15 crew.

The story is based on the real Rose Ford, a 13 year old Scottish girl. Her police record number 200 describes her physical characteristics: she was 'four feet seven inches tall, had brown hair, an oval head, fair complexion, a full visage, flat forehead, brown eyebrows, hazel eyes, and a medium nose and mouth'. She was illiterate. Rose was a repeat offender and as this was her third conviction for housebreaking she was transported for 7 years. Her two sisters were also transported.

A combination of factors, including wars in Europe and the return of soldiers displacing women in work, the industrial revolution and land enclosures caused an influx of people into cities. Rose and her family like many others just survived. In Hobart, Rose had a couple of episodes including running away and then she seems to have vanished into the community, started a new life and no more offences were recorded.

Elizabeth Fry, set up a convict ship committee and it was decided that needlework was a skill that women could use to gain employment in the colony and to keep them occupied on the journey.. A 'useful bag' bag was given to each woman containing various things including personal items such as aprons, hats, comb, as well as needles, spectacles, scissors, cottons in different colours, thimbles, small and larger pieces of material, and a Hessian bag for clothes.

It is accepted that perhaps 50 or more women made this quilt and there was a great variation in needlework skills.. There is an inscription in fine needlework thanking the Ladies Committee in London, the date June 1841. It is probable that this was not the work of the convict women but perhaps the matron. Kezia Hater would have had to justify her passage to Van Diemann's Land and the quilt would have been proof. It has been suggested that some of the women may have resented making this quilt as they wanted to make items to sell on the way and clothes and quilts for themselves. However, this quilt is incredibly important as it is the only known surviving quilt of this period. Other items made by convict women would have been sold, used and reused until they fell apart.

On arrival in Hobart the quilt was presented to Lady Jane Franklin, wife of the Governor. At some stage it made its way back to England where it vanished for 146 years and ended up in Scotland. It was purchased by the Australian Textile Fund in 1989, with donations raised by quilting associations. It is now held in the National Gallery in Canberra. As it is incredibly fragile it is rarely on display.

The quilting community celebrates the Rajah quilt in many ways including the Rajah award. Lessa Siegele, has made a half size version and a pattern is available for quilters. For more information go to Research Tasmania–Patchwork Prisoners, authors Trudy Cowly and Dianne Snowde, :research@tasmania.com.au, and the National Gallery of Australia: nga.gov.au/rajaquilt

Claire did not use Rose's story out of respect for her living descendents. The fictional story of Lizzie Flynn also enabled her to amalgamate the stories of a number of women. The matron, Kezia Hater, married the captain, Charles Ferguson, settled In Williamstown and had two children.

There were questions and discussion from the audience around quilt making especially the hessian quilts made by poor women during the depression.

Claire concluded by saying that when she writes for young readers she wants to generate questions and not whitewash history. She wants children to know how women survived.

Although this picture story book is pitched to the middle primary years it has layers of interest and broad appeal for older and younger readers.

UAW UPDATE

Sally McManus, new Secretary of ACTU. The UAW has written to congratulate Sally on her new position. We are pleased that the two leading positions in the organisation are held by capable women. The union movement may now reflect the interests of the majority of its membership, which is female.

We also support Sally's stand that unjust laws should not be respected and were disgusted at the pathetic response of leading Labor politicians, with Brendan O'Connors suggesting that the only way to change unjust laws is to change the government. Tell that to the South Africans who opposed Apartheid, or, closer to home, young men who opposed the draft for the Vietnam War - which the US later agreed was a mistake. We are with Sally!

Keep Australia out of US Wars. The UAW has added our name to a statement to go into major daily newspapers and that will be circulated to on-line papers and journals. We have also made a donation towards costs. An initiative of IPAN (The Independent and Peaceful Australia Network), it has already been signed by John Pilger and David Bradbury. It is a public call for an independent and peaceful Australian Foreign Policy.

"We the undersigned are deeply concerned with the growing threat of another major world war.

We are alarmed that as a compliant ally of the US, Australia will be dragged into another US provoked war with devastating consequences for people and the environment.

Australia hosts thousands of US marines in Darwin and conducts joint military exercises in Qld with tens of thousands of US troops. Australia hosts the giant US spy base at Pine Gap, near Alice Springs, used by the US for its targeting of assassination drones and for gathering intelligence for use in wars. The North West Cape base in Western Australia sends critical messages to US nuclear-armed submarines, and is heavily involved in space warfare. Australia is involved wars and military build ups in the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. In none of these wars has the invaded country been a threat to Australia or the Australian people. In the international forums Australia echoes US policies opposing Nuclear Disarmament...

Australia boycotts negotiations for a new global treaty to ban nuclear weapons. An article in the February Newsletter outlined the issue. The UAW also wrote to both the Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs. A recently received response from the Dept of PM and Cabinet assured us that the government is *'committed to international efforts towards nuclear disarmament'*, but not without the participation of nuclear countries. No offending the US, obviously.

UAW opposes Australian government support for arms deals with Saudi Arabia. We have written to Christopher Pyne, Minister for Defence Industry, expressing our horror and concern that the government *"is supporting the export of military equipment to an autocracy that is accused of ongoing involvement in a conflict in Yemen that has already killed 10,000 civilians (UN figures). Saudi Arabia stands accused of airstrikes that target funerals, schools and hospitals – in other words, women and children.*

..The Dutch parliament voted to ban military exports to Saudi Arabia on humanitarian grounds...You are quoted as talking about 'strict controls', and criteria that includes human rights, international obligations and regional security. Nothing about peace, reconciliation or humanitarian concerns."

What have we come to as a country when a Minister is eager to support deals in death, destruction and misery.

APRIL INDEX

What's On	Page 1
The power of women's friendship	Pages 2-3
Equality is a "profoundly conservative goal": Germaine Greer	Page 3
Equal Pay – or is it Pay Equity? Another good woman resigns from politics	Page 4
IWD Speaker: Claire Saxby on The Rajah Quilt	Pages 5 and 6
UAW Update	Page 7
April Index	Page 8

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