

Union of Australian Women(Vic.)

Newsletter

AUGUST 2017

Sunday 6 August
2.00 – 4.30pm

Remember Hiroshima and Nagasaki
Speaker: Prof Richard Tanter
Chair ICAN (Australia Board)
Melbourne Unitarian Peace memorial Church
110 Grey St East Melbourne
Organised by CICD and Unitarian Church

2.00 – 4.00

Peace Vigil outside St Paul's Cathedral
Medical Association for the Prevention of War

Wednesday 9 August
10.30 – 12.30

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

Thursday 10 August
1.00 – 3.00

UAW Book Group
2nd floor meeting room Ross House

SEPTEMBER 2017

Wednesday 20 September
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Coffee with a Focus
Speaker to be announced.
Put the date in your diary!

Apology: A combination of factors meant that we were not able to publish the Newsletter in JULY .

NOTES ON AN EXODUS –THE REFUGEE CRISIS IN SYRIA**Carmen Green**

What I have always appreciated most about my weekly visits to my local public library is browsing through the bookshelves for a book to read. I nearly always find something totally unexpected and informative. Last week was no exception when by total chance I saw a little gem of a book “Notes on an Exodus” –an essay by Richard Flanagan (winner of the Man Booker prize in 2014) with illustrations by Ben Quilty (Archibald Prize winner).

In January 2016 Flanagan and Quilty travelled to Lebanon, Greece and Serbia to investigate at first hand the huge exodus of people –5 million of them -men, women and children- fleeing from Syria. The Syrian refugees had been caught between the cruelty of Daesh and the horror of the Assad regime. Forced to choose between life and death, he writes: “they choose life”. Flanagan’s notes and Quilty’s sketches bear witness to the refugees they meet on their journey and to their stories. The stories give us a profoundly moving story of human dignity and courage in the face of the overwhelming horror of war and suffering.

The book describes how in the refugee camps the suffering of the refugees continues as there is not enough money for medicines and food. They live in plastic clad hovels –endless shanty towns. They are heavily in debt. They dream of returning to Syria to their old lives before the horror of war. Quilty’s sketches show the adults with incredibly sad faces and down cast eyes. Six year old Heba’s picture of a barrel bombing by a helicopter gunship above a house with dead people filled me with total sadness.

Far too many Australians are dismissive and ignorant of the causes and the reality of the plight of refugees –they need to read this book which describes people who are fleeing from violence, terror and death and who are desperate to save their children. They show courage in the face of insurmountable odds. No one could read these notes without becoming more understanding of the global plight of refugees. The book humanises the refugees, particularly the children.

Richard Flanagan’s concluding remarks are profound *“Refugees are not like you and me. They are you and me. The terrible river of the wretched and the damned flowing through Europe is my family. And there is no time in the future in which they might be helped. The only time we have is now.”* This deeply sad and important little book should be mandatory reading for all Australians particularly Australian politicians.

Richard Flanagan and Ben Quilty have donated the royalties from this book to World Vision and ask their readers to also help Syrian Refugees by donating to a charity such as World Vision and by calling on the Australian Government to do more. They tell us that *“If the Australian Government spent one dollar on helping Syrians for every dollar it has spent bombing Syria it would increase the amount of aid 800% -from an average of \$45 million a year over the five years of the Syrian war to \$400 million- the sum we spent in 2015 waging war in Syria.”*

“Notes on an Exodus” –an essay by Richard Flanagan with illustrations by Ben Quilty –Vintage Books published by Penquin in 2016

<https://www.worldvision.com.au/global-issues/world-emergencies/syrian-refugee-crisis/richard-flanagan-syria>

A TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR GILLIAN TRIGGS

Anne Sgro

Professor Gillian Triggs is about to conclude her 5 year term as President of the Australian Human Rights Commission at the time of writing. I would like to pay tribute to her and acknowledge her courage, dignity and determination.

In 2014 she launched a National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention, and it was the Commission's 2015 Report: **The Forgotten Children**, that caused unprecedented savage, personal attacks on the president by members of the Coalition Government. The Report found that the practice of holding children in detention was in breach of international human rights law and detrimental to children's health and well-being. It was information that the Government did not want publicized, and every attempt was made to denigrate her; she was offered another role in an attempt to remove her from the Commission.

In June 2015, the UAW wrote to her,

"... to commend and thank you for your defence of human rights and the rule of law in the face of appalling, vicious personal attacks by government ministers who seem intent on diminishing our democratic rights.

We admire your calm, dignified and resolute demeanour in the face of such bullying tactics.

The Union of Australian Women is this year celebrating 65 years of campaigning for the status and well-being of women, peace, social justice and human rights. We are so glad that we have in you, and your Commission, people and an organisation that is determined to safeguard and stand up for democratic principles and the rule of law."

Professor Triggs sent us a prompt reply:

"I was very encouraged to receive your letter and to know that I have your support. Thank you for taking the time to write to me and for your kind words.

Your letter gives me and my colleagues at the Commission great encouragement to stay the course."

But Gillian Triggs did much more. She also called for marriage equality, for an end to sexual harassment, especially in workplaces. She defended 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act while requesting changes to how the Commission could best respond. She defended Yassmin Abdel-Magied after vicious attacks on her for having had the temerity to say *Lest We Forget* in relation to asylum seekers and others suffering war and horror. The President rightly called out the racist under-tones of the attacks on the young journalist.

She was named the 2017 recipient of the Voltaire Award by Liberty Victoria in May for her "courageous stand on people's rights."

Gillian Triggs served us well as President of the Human Rights Commission. She was dignified, calm, resolute and courageous in her defence of our democratic rights. In an interview in *The Big Issue* (14-27 July) she says: "I would tell my 16-year-old self to have courage, seize opportunities and remember always to respect your fellow human beings. I feel that if you're on a roll, you might as well keep going. I've got a number of new appointments when I finish here, one is becoming chairman of Justice Connect, which links pro-bono lawyers with people who can't afford legal advice. I will use whatever I can to speak up for these social justice issues. As long as I'm well, I can't stop."

We thank her and wish her well.

AUSTRALIA TO BE A MAJOR ARMS EXPORTER?

Anne Sgro

In March, the UAW wrote to Christopher Pyne, Minister for Defence Industry, expressing grave concern that he was supporting military exports to Saudi Arabia, *“an autocracy that is accused of ongoing involvement in a conflict in Yemen that has already killed 10,000 civilians...”* We pointed out that the Dutch parliament had voted to ban military exports to that country on humanitarian grounds, and questioned why Australia was rushing to fill the void.

Pyne’s reply assured us that the exports were assessed against five criteria: *“international obligations, national security, human rights, regional security and foreign policy”* and that they would build the resilience and sustainability of our defence industry, creating skilled manufacturing jobs. He has since indicated that he wants Australia to become a major arms exporter and a designer of warships and submarines on a par with Britain, France and Germany.

So the very government that destroyed the car manufacturing industry in Australia, causing the loss of skilled work and thousands of jobs, and is not interested in putting funds into developing an alternative energy industry to which Australia would be well suited, is keen to build up an industry that peddles death and destruction. And as a recent letter-writer to the Age pointed out, supply would be limitless, because as soon as a trigger is pulled or a button pushed more supplies would be required. Massive profits are being made by the powerful armaments industry which obviously couldn’t care less about the behaviour or politics of its customers – hence the support for Saudi Arabia notwithstanding its actions in Yemen and elsewhere. It is a valued ally and customer of the West. Who cares about democracy or death when massive profits can be made?

World Vision Australia chief Tim Costello has been a lone voice in protesting Christopher Pyne’s plans, stating that *“This is a government that has cut humanitarian aid, which saves lives, to the lowest level in our history... The government says this is an export and investment opportunity – but we would be exporting death and profiting from bloodshed. Is that what we want Australia known for? ...There is only one purpose in making a weapon and that is to kill someone with it.”* (The Age 18/7/17) The response to the Rev Costello from Pyne’s spokesperson sounds as though it is the same response that the UAW received from our letter – business opportunities and high-tech manufacturing.

Dwight D Eisenhower, who I have never considered progressive, and who was in power when I was a child, is quoted in this month’s The Beacon. *“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life in any true sense. Under the clouds of war, it is humanity hanging on a cross of iron.”*

Looking at the world situation can lead to despair. When will the violence, death and destruction end? The West has invaded Iraq, intervened in Afghanistan, Libya and Syria – to get its hands on resources,” export democracy”, fight terrorism. But that’s all for another article. In the meantime, let’s tell Christopher Pyne and his government that we don’t support the construction of an armaments industry in Australia. We want life over death.

Write to him or telephone: Hon Christopher Pyne. Minister for Defence Industry.

Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600.

Tel: Parliament House 02 6277 7840. Electoral Office: 08 8431 2288

Have a voice! Make that call. It’s easy.

MELBOURNE WRITERS' FESTIVAL 2017 THEME IS "REVOLUTION" Carmen Green

We live in incredibly troubling times. The daily horrors include the plight of refugees, the inaction on climate change, the ongoing nightmare of the wars in the Middle East, growing inequality, North Korea and the possibility of nuclear war with the US. Add to this gender inequality, racial intolerance and homophobia. So I was pleased to discover that the theme for this year's Melbourne Writers' Festival (MWF) is "Revolution" and most of the authors included are exploring in their writing ways in which the world can become better for all humanity and not just for a privileged few. In these dark and depressing times these ideas are indeed revolutionary.

Indigenous author and double Miles Franklin winner **Kim Scott** will deliver to opening address, the first time that an indigenous writer has done so. His opening address explores how writing yourself into history can challenge Australian identity and transform our connection to language and land.

There are 5 Big Ideas sessions Presented by **The Monthly**:

Julian Burnside QC- in the session on "Injustice.

Nancy MacLean –the Alan Missen Oration – "Democracy in China"

Sean McMeekin- "The Russian Revolution"

Shireen Morris- "Constitutional Recognition" and

Shashi Tharoor "Colonialism in India"

Here are some of my MWF choices:

Yassmin Abdel- Magied –mechanical engineer, social advocate, writer & broadcaster is appearing in the Gala session "A Better Tomorrow".

Jane Caro -author, broadcaster, columnist, and writer appears in the session "A Better Tomorrow".

Anna Krien –writer, environmentalist and activist –appears in the session on Climate change activism.

George Megalogenis –author and broadcaster- session on "Housing Affordability".

Joyce Carol Oates – who will talk about bearing witness as a novelist and the role of a novelist in these challenging times and

Gillian Triggs –Australian academic and recently departed President of the Australian Human Rights Commission –appearing with Scott Ludlam (former Greens' Senator) on "Understanding Metadata"

The 2017 MWF starts on Friday 25 August and finishes on Sunday 3 September. Tickets went on sale on Friday 21 July. This is the 31st MWF and since 2008 it has been held in various locations at Federation Square. There are nearly 400 writers-both local and international- appearing in just over 200 sessions. Most of the sessions cost \$22 full or \$19 concession, the keynote sessions are \$30 full/\$35 concession and the big ideas are \$30 full/ \$27 concession. There are also a number of free sessions.

So in these troubling days for humanity why don't you join with me and hundreds of other book lovers and attend this year's Melbourne Writers' Festival and be inspired by writers who will present the best case scenarios of how our world could be.

The easiest way to buy tickets is online at mwf.com.au or over the phone 9999 1199 (10 am -5 pm Monday-Friday) or at the box office: Level 1, 176 Little Collins Street, Melbourne (10 am -5 pm Monday-Friday)

LET'S CREATE A CLAMOUR FOR HUMANITY FOR REFUGEES Anne Sgro

The UAW has written to Immigration Minister Peter Dutton urging him to use his discretion as Minister to allow asylum seekers on Nauru and Manus Island who have close family in Australia to be brought here. We have also written to the Opposition Leader asking him to speak up on the issue.

Along with many others I held a candle for asylum seekers last Wednesday evening at one of the many gatherings around the country to mark four years since the decision that no refugee arriving by boat would be settled in Australia. I continue to stand with the Wills Grandmothers at our weekly vigil for children. But it is not enough. The Australian Government has now sunk to an even greater low with the revelations of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees that there was an 'understanding' that, following on from the agreement with the United States, those with close family ties in Australia would be re-settled here – an understanding that families would not be separated.

One would have to ask: Why would any government refuse to re-unite a small number of vulnerable people who have support and family here? There is the case of a middle-aged man whose wife and teenage daughters are living in Sydney – they became separated. Why would any decent person refuse to unite that family? The UNHCR says that there *are 'parents kept apart from their children, wives kept apart from their husbands, and refugees who arrived alone as minors unable to join the rest of their family in Australia.'* (Age 26.7.17) It is unconscionable. One can sometimes feel despair at the awfulness of government policy, but we can take some simple steps to have a voice. Let's flood our local MPs letter boxes and emails with simple letters of protest and a demand for humanity and decency. Telephone their office. It is relatively easy to support GetUp and the ASRC with a click on a petition, but I think that individual contact still counts for a lot. Let's get cracking.

Hon Peter Dutton
Minister for Immigration and Border Control
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
02 6277 7860
07 3205 9977 (electorate office)
peter.dutton.mp@aph.gov.au

Hon Bill Shorten
Leader of the Opposition
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
02 6277 4022
03 9326 1300 (electorate office)

WAR, PEACE AND INDEPENDENCE – KEEP AUSTRALIA OUT OF US WARS CONFERENCE
8 – 10 September, Melbourne

The UAW supports IPAN (Independent and Peaceful Australia Network, which is a national network of more than 70 affiliated peace, community, social justice, unions and faith organisations working together against wars of aggression, for peace and an independent Australian foreign policy. They have organised a conference for the above weekend to which we are all invited. A terrific line-up of speakers includes Dr Margaret Beavis, Medical Association for the Prevention of War, Prof Richard Tanter, Dr Alison Broinowski, former Diplomat, Rob Stary, Human Rights lawyer.

There is a Public Forum Friday 8 September, 7.00pm \$10. Jasper Hotel Conference Centre 489 Elizabeth St.

The Conference, Saturday/Sunday 9 and 10 September. \$50/\$30 per day (inc lunch).
MUA Victorian Branch, 46 – 54 Ireland St West Melbourne.

Book: www.trybooking.com/286873

ipan.org.au

ipan.australia@gmail.com

Shirley Winton 0417 456 001

TREATY ON THE PROHIBITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS**Anne Sgro**

It is 72 years since the horrific bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 6 and 9 August 1945 respectively. And the threat of the use of nuclear weapons is still very much alive with North Korea making rapid progress in the development of missiles that could potentially reach the west coast of the US and the north of Australia. Add that America appears to be governed by an unstable leader and there is genuine cause for concern.

But there is good news, which received little media attention. To quote Tim Wright from ICAN (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons), *'At the United Nations on Friday, 7 July, the vast majority of the world's governments made clear their total rejection of these abhorrent devices, concluding a treaty to prohibit them, categorically, for all time. It was a moment of great historical significance.'*

The treaty recognizes the harm suffered both from nuclear weapons and the two-thousand-plus nuclear test explosions that have been conducted across the globe since 1945. The Australian media have acknowledged the recent death of an indigenous activist, for example, who was blinded by testing on his land at Maralinga. The treaty obliges nations to provide assistance to the victims but its over-riding mission is to ensure that no-one else ever suffers as they have.

All nine nuclear-armed nations boycotted the negotiations and therefore did not vote. Australia refused to take any part in the negotiations. The UAW did write to the Prime Minister, asserting that it was in Australia's interests to be part of the process (February Newsletter). The treaty prohibits its state parties from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, using, or threatening to use nuclear weapons. It also prohibits them from assisting, encouraging, or inducing anyone to engage in any of those activities, and they must not permit nuclear weapons to be stationed on their territory.

While I knew that New Zealand had long taken a decision to prevent nuclear ships from entering their harbours, I was not aware that South Africa, which was also supportive of the treaty, is the only nation to have built a nuclear arsenal before eliminating it completely. A nation that possesses nuclear weapons may join the treaty, so long as it agrees to remove them from operational status immediately and destroy them with a legally binding plan. One that hosts another nation's nuclear weapons on its territory may also join on condition that they are removed by a specified deadline.

The treaty opens for signature in New York on September 20 when world leaders meet for the annual opening of the UN General Assembly. It must be ratified by fifty nations before it can enter into full legal force.

This is just a first step. With close to 15,000 nuclear weapons in the world, and some nations seeking to add to the number, there is a long way to go in eliminating this huge threat to humanity. But it is an important first step and we should celebrate it.

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