

Union of Australian Women(Vic.)

Newsletter

WHAT'S ON-FEBRUARY 2017

All the best for 2017, members and friends – despite Trump, Brexit and Malcolm. I hope that you had a relaxing break and are back, ready to do whatever we can for progress, women, peace and social justice. Every action, however small, counts

We look forward to your participation, energy and support. It will be another year of campaigning!

You will find the 2017 Diary included on page 7 of this Newsletter.

FEBRUARY

Wednesday 8 February
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Organising Committee
3rd floor meeting room 2: 3.2 Ross House

Thursday 9 February
1.00 – 3.00

UAW Book Group
2nd floor meeting room, Ross House

Thursday 16 February
11.00 – 2.00

UAW-Seniors Network
3rd floor meeting room 2: 3.2 Ross House

MARCH

Celebrate International Women's Day with the UAW.
Wednesday 22 March 10.30 – 12.30 4th floor Ross House

Speaker: Claire Saxby award winning writer of
My Name is Lizzie Flynn: The Story of the Rajah Quilt

Put the date in your diary now!

IS IT TIME FOR SOME CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE?

By Anne Sgro

I asked myself this question on Human Rights Day, 10 December last year, when I was walking with Grandmothers and friends across Flinders Street at the conclusion of the first part of a rally to support and free refugee children from their detention on Nauru. We listened to two terrific speakers, Pam Jonas and Pamela Curr, then we were on our way to consign backpacks in the hope that children would take them to the US. It was organised and polite. There were several hundred of us, and I wondered aloud: "How would it be if we temporarily occupied the intersection? That would disrupt complacency and get attention to the plight of children at a time supposedly focusing on the Christmas message of peace and good will". I was regarded with some bemusement by those walking close to me when I voiced the idea. But the more I thought about it, the more I felt that the time for good manners has passed.

I remembered the lightning reaction to Border Force's aim to detain and check people at random in the city early in 2016: thanks to social media, the intersection was blocked in short time, and that proposal was hastily withdrawn. I remembered UAW member, the late Alvie Booth, who, at 90, joined a demonstration in support of Indigenous rights and opposition to the expansion of uranium mining at Jabiluka with the intent purpose of getting herself arrested to gain publicity. It was certainly effective – photographs of the tiny white haired woman and her message were widespread.

When talking over the issue of civil disobedience with my Wills Grandmothers Group after our weekly vigil at a busy intersection in Coburg, we were reminded that, when the Grandmothers had undertaken the very successful bus trip to Canberra in March 2016 to meet with as many politicians as possible, and to have a presence in the gallery, there was a suggestion that proceedings be disrupted by unfurling a series of banners over the balcony. These banners would have been hidden under clothing, because security was paranoid in its 'tightness' – no placards anywhere, no demonstration (although the group did manage to subvert the process by singing "We Shall Overcome" in the entrance lobby to the dismay of guards).

The proposal was discussed and rejected because the grandmothers didn't want to be thrown out before they had seen as many politicians as possible. Personally, I think the resulting publicity would have been well worth any consequences. I remember when my husband, Giovanni, along with Brunswick Girls' High School principal June English, disrupted the opening of the Victorian Parliament in September 1974 by unfurling a banner demanding a fair go for working class girls. It dramatically increased the chances of getting a new school.

Glenn Tommasetti's song "Don't be too polite girls" has been swirling through my head of late. The Grandmothers have done a terrific job of campaigning for the release of refugee children from detention. They are well-organised, visible and out there. But is it time for all of us to up the ante?

My group is interested, but wants something that is non-violent (obviously), preferably that could turn the tables on Dutton and his ghastly colleagues by being humourous, and grab attention. Another asylum seeker has died a preventable death under our watch. What do you think? Am I becoming too 'bolshie' in my old age?

Ideas, anybody?

A TREATY TO PROHIBIT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Anne Sgro

Why can't we be more like our Kiwi neighbor New Zealand, which also has a conservative government but has a history of independence and decency? Some years ago, New Zealand banned US nuclear submarines from entering its harbours, has been much more humane and welcoming in its dealings with asylum seekers, is more generous and supportive to its non-citizen permanent residents. Two latest actions have made me ponder this phenomena again. We have so much in common, yet increasingly see the world and act differently.

In December, New Zealand co-sponsored a resolution calling for Israel to stop building settlements on occupied Palestinian land, resulting in Benjamin Netanyahu declaring the action a "declaration of war." The resolution was supported by all members of the Security Council other than the US, which abstained. New Zealand seems determined to support a Middle East peace deal that does not support the theft of land that belongs to Palestinian families. And Australia's position?

Also in late December, the 23rd to be precise, the United Nations General Assembly approved a historic resolution to launch negotiations in 2017 on a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons. While a number of nuclear-armed countries, including the US and Russia, were strongly opposed, the resolution was adopted by a large majority: 113 UN member states voted in favour; **35 against, including Australia**; 13 abstained. **New Zealand voted in favour**. Support was strongest among the nations of Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, SE Asia and the Pacific. A cross-regional group comprising Austria, Brazil, Ireland, Mexico, Nigeria and South Africa initiated the resolution and are likely to lead the 2017 negotiations. The vast majority of the world's nations believe it is well beyond time to declare nuclear weapons illegal. How disappointing that Australia sided with the nuclear powers and has yet to decide whether it will even participate in the negotiations which will begin in March. **The UAW has written to the Prime Minister, urging that our government do so, that it is in our interests to produce a strong and effective treaty.**

Who has the nuclear weapons? (*Figures from ICAN website www.icanw.org/au*)

USA	6,970 warheads	Russia	7,300
UK	215	France	300
China	260	India	100-120
Pakistan	110-130	Israel	80
North Korea	up to 10		

Other weapons of mass destruction – chemical weapons, biological weapons, landmines, cluster bombs – have all been prohibited by their respective treaties, and the threats posed by them dramatically reduced as a result. All were the result of solid campaigning. Countries like Cambodia, for example, are still dealing with the deadly repercussions of landmines and cluster bombs. They continue to maim and kill countless ordinary people long after the end of the Vietnam war. **But nuclear weapons threaten life on earth itself.** Both Trump and Putin, in their posturing and bravado, have announced their desire to in fact strengthen nuclear capacities. The US believes "the efforts to delegitimize nuclear weapons are at odds with its policy of nuclear deterrence", and "...Australia has been leading the charge to undermine the process..." of prohibition. (*Dr Sue Warhan, Canberra Times 29.12.16*)

A 2014 Nielsen poll found 84% of Australians support nuclear disarmament. Both the ALP and the Greens support a ban treaty.

"The world is one big step closer to stigmatizing, prohibiting and eliminating the most destructive, inhumane, indiscriminate devices ever created..." (*Sue Warham*) and that is cause for celebration. Let's keep the pressure on our government to put humanity's interests first.

UAW SOUTHERN BRANCH'S BRUNCH AT THE BEACH

Early in December, before the silly season attempted to engulf us, UAW Southern Branch held its annual brunch for peace at the Mordialloc Foreshore. It was a beautiful day – tranquil, sunny, cool breeze, good food – and it was terrific to meet old friends, some of whom had made a particular effort to be there. Speaker Cr Rosemary West got us up to date with Kingston politics. She urged us all to keep protecting green spaces, but also emphasized the importance of writing to our councilors to let them know what we think, and writing to the local papers to put our points of view. Thanks to Amy and Mairi for all their work. We enjoyed ourselves and had good discussion.

THE MOLLY HADFIELD AWARD. Amy Duncan attended Parliament House in December to be present at the Pennington Awards for housing initiatives and support. The Molly Hadfield Award to commemorate Molly's campaigns for public housing, was part of the ceremony.

UAW ORGANISING COMMITTEE UPDATE

The UAW has joined **The Coalition to Protect 18C**, a national alliance aimed at discouraging the federal government from weakening the Racial Discrimination Act.

Two letters went to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull:

- urging him to participate in the UN treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons (article Page 3);
- condemning the 2nd asylum seeker death on Manus Island from lack of medical attention, and urging action to resettle the men.

WE REALLY HAVE COME A LONG WAY - 50 YEARS SINCE THE LIFTING OF THE "MARRIAGE BAR"

Cath Morrison

Sometimes, among the many depressing stories of gender inequality and the objectification and commodification of women which still persist in the 21st century in Australia, it is good to reflect on how difficult things were for women when many of our members were young. That reflection brings the realisation that while women still have much to overcome to achieve equality, there are vast advantages which have been won for young women today through the feminist struggles of the past 5 decades.

This is also a spur to us to keep up the fight!

An example of change for the better- hard for today's young women to believe -until 1966 women who got married had to leave their jobs in the public service: this "marriage bar" -as it was called- was only lifted in 1966.

Marian Sawyer had a great piece in [Inside Story](#) (December 8, 2016) setting out the background to this change and the work of Merle Thornton, who, forced to resign from her job because of marriage, founded the Equal Opportunities for Women Association in Queensland, or EOW, the primary goal of which was the removal of the Commonwealth marriage bar.

EOW set about lobbying and producing material relevant to its case in an ultimately successful campaign. Marion Sawyer concluded that Thornton and the EOW's campaign and its emphasis on the authenticity of women's own experience foreshadowed- as did the direct action on behalf of women's rights- the arrival of women's liberation later in the decade.

GENDER EQUALITY: VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT STRATEGY ANNOUNCED

Cath Morrison

The Victorian Government recently released its Strategy in response to its Gender Equity Consultation process to which the UAW made a Submission (<http://www.uaw.org.au/submissions.html>). The Strategy is a far-reaching blueprint for major change for women in Victoria and deserves more publicity than it has so far received. It is accessible on the web (<http://www.vic.gov.au/women/gender-equality/a-victorian-gender-equality-strategy.html>) and members will be able to read it there. It is being reprinted and I have ordered a print copy for the UAW which will be available in the office.

Minister Fiona Richardson, in launching the Strategy, made a fabulous speech, highlighting the Andrews government's work in gender equality through combating domestic violence (with family violence leave now in public sector industrial agreements) but also stressing the need for long term structural changes to improve gender equity over generations, not over one or two terms of Government!

As Minister Richardson reminds us: ... despite women having the vote for 100 years, there are so very few lasting institutions, memorials, measures, legislation ...helping women succeed. There is no Women's Act; no Women's agency, too few monuments to our sacrifice and our achievements. This (gender) strategy will put an end to this neglect. We will together elevate gender equality and the rights of women beyond election and budget cycles . While a very bright light is being shone on family violence and inequality, we need to embed long term structures and actions for progress. She concluded that addressing the economic insecurity of women workers will be a focus of our government through this strategy.

Government reforms will cover:

- legislative changes
- governance structures
- employment practices
- policy
- procurement
- funding decisions
- advocacy to the Commonwealth Government.

The Government will establish two committees to work with it to resolve gender problems. **The Ministerial Council on Women's Equality** will focus on addressing the gender gap in a range of key areas, including jobs for women, the accessibility of childcare and women's experience of poverty. **The Equal Workplaces Advisory Committee** will focus on workplace discrimination, occupational segregation and inequity in pay.

We look forward to seeing the implementation of the Committees' recommendations in Government legislation and resulting initiatives for women's equality. Let us hope progress is not as glacial as it has been in the past.

NB: Within the many pages of the Strategy document is one other very good piece of news; the Government will fund the first Women's Museum in Victoria!

I will do a follow up piece on progress toward the Museum in a later issue .

HEALTH AND POVERTY IN AUSTRALIA : WOMEN'S GENDER GAP

Cath Morrison

Following on Carmen Green's article (Nov 2016) on the work of Sir Michael Marmot in analysing the links between disadvantage and poor health outcomes in the UK, there is also a body of Australian research which provides a local research context and comes to similar conclusions but with even greater implications for women.

Intuitively we know that socioeconomic disadvantage and health are linked but the linkage needs to be quantified and proved to have any impact on health policy makers in this country.

Just recently I have read several articles discussing recent research which does just that. The more readable one, in *The Conversation* (December 19, 2016) reported on research by the Sax Institute which linked lower education levels and postcode with a greater risk of heart disease with education levels showing the highest correlation. Those without any educational qualifications had 150% higher rate of heart attack than those with a University degree. It was not intended to imply that one causes the other: only that they are correlated. The Institute has been running a study called [45 and Up](#), following 267,153 men and women in New South Wales aged over 45, tracking them for at least five years on average. The *Conversation* article gave a broad overview of the findings of this major study, concluding that education levels and heart disease were linked, while stroke was not linked to educational levels.

Another source of information on this topic comes from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (a Federal Government body). Referring to 2014 data the AIHW noted that heart disease and stroke have decreased markedly over the past three decades (*The number of CVD deaths declined by 22% (from around 57,500 to 45,000) between 1985 and 2014*). Significantly, however, the AIHW also noted that inequalities increased heart disease death rates. CVD death rates increased with [remoteness](#) and [socioeconomic disadvantage](#), and were higher among [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#): and were 1.4 times as high in the lowest SES group.

It is even worse for women. ..yet another gender gap

Low socioeconomic status is a known risk factor for cardiovascular disease in both men and women but it is women who are bearing the brunt of coronary heart disease. Recent research has established a link between women, heart disease and disadvantage (not related to lifestyle factors such as smoking or drinking alcohol). Disadvantaged women are 25 per cent more likely to have a heart attack than their male counterparts a study has found. The researchers reviewed 116 studies, involving 22 million people from Australia, Asia, Europe and the US. They ruled out many risk factors as the cause of the gap, believing instead that delayed identification and treatment of high-risk women is involved. Women are more inclined to dismiss their symptoms and so are their doctors! Dr Sanne Peters says "Men and women have a similar lifetime risk of heart disease. However, women, on average, develop heart disease 5-10 years later in life than men. This advantage is smaller among women with a lower socioeconomic status. "We need to examine why this is happening and make sure women are able to access lifesaving treatment."

The results published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* demonstrate a need for tailored interventions for women to address the gender gap and deliver the best possible care for women. ((reported in *The Conversation* 23/1/2017)

Contd.p 8

UNION OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN (Victoria) DIARY FOR 2017

ORGANISING COMMITTEE MEETINGS: Wednesdays on the following dates from 10.30am to 12.30pm. : Third floor meeting room 2: 3.2

8 February	8 March	12 April
10 May	14 June	12 July
9 August	13 September	11 October (TBC)
8 November	6 December	

GENERAL MEETINGS: COFFEE WITH A FOCUS

Wednesday 22 March 10.30am fourth floor meeting room Ross House **IWD**
 Wednesday 21 June 10.30am
 Wednesday 20 September Tuesday 10.30am

AGM: To be advised

BOOK GROUP: meetings held from 1pm to 3pm on the second Thursday of the month as follows. Second floor meeting room: 2.1

9 February	9 March*	13 April	11 May
8 June	13 July	10 August	14 September
12 October	9 November		

* First floor, Room 3: 1.3

UAW-SENIORS NETWORK: quarterly meetings on Thursdays as follows -

11.00am to 2.00pm, Third floor room 2: 3.2

16 February	18 May	17 August	16 November
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The **SOUTHERN BRANCH'S** meeting dates will be published in the March Newsletter

CONT. FROM PAGE 6

Surely if we reduce inequality and the associated poverty and disadvantage heart disease death rates will fall further. We knew that already, but inequality is increasing.

What further research could possibly be needed before action is taken to reduce inequality in Australia and the impact this has on health outcomes specially for women?

UAW BOOK GROUP 2017

For over 10 years an enthusiastic group of UAW book-lovers (organised by Jenny Stewart) has been meeting monthly in Ross House. We meet 10 times per year on the second Thursday of each month from 1 pm to 3 pm to discuss books which are selected in the main- from the CAE catalogues. Over the years, we've read some fabulous books & had some great discussions. We are always on the lookout for new members so if you think you'd like to join a book group with members who have shared values, but many different opinions, come into Ross House on the second Thursday of the month and check us out.

You can also join us for lunch beforehand at 12 noon in the Japanese café directly opposite Ross House. Our next meeting is on Thursday 9th February starting at 1pm in the Second Floor meeting room 2.1

FEBRUARY INDEX

What's On	Page 1
Is it time for some civil disobedience?	Page 2
A Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons	Page 3
UAW Update, Southern Branch Brunch for Peace, We have come a long way since 1966-marriage bar	Page 4
Gender Equality strategy –Vict.Govt.	Page 5
Health, Poverty and the gender gap	Page 6
UAW Diary for 2017	Page 7
UAW Book Group, February Index	Page 8

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