

Union of Australian Women(Vic.)

Newsletter

WHAT'S ON- MAY

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**

**Sunday 7 May
1.00**

**Traditional May Day March
Trades Hall, cnr Lygon & Victoria Sts Carlton**

**Wednesday 10 May
10.30 – 12.30**

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

**Thursday 11 May
1.00 – 3.00**

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

**Thursday 18 May
11.00 – 2.00**

**UAW-Seniors Network
Third floor meeting room 2 Ross House:3.2**

**Saturday 20 May
9.00 – 4.30**

**Democratic Opposition to War
The 1916-17 anti-conscription campaigns:
impacts and legacies (pm section on women)
Siteworks,33 Saxon St Brunswick
\$20/\$30 www.trybooking.com/PGRV**

27 May – 3 June

**National Reconciliation Week
50 years since the 1967 referendum
25 years since the historic Mabo decision
For events: www.reconciliationvic.org.au**

DISTURBING REPORT BY ERA ON THE CONTINUING BARRIERS TO EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA

Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) is Australia's largest network advocating for women's equality, women's leadership and recognition of women's diversity. 61 organisations belong to ERA including the UAW—all have an interest in advancing women's equality.

To advance gender equality ERA adopts a human rights framework and advocates for adherence to international human rights principles. Currently, the UN Committee on Economic, social and Cultural Rights is reviewing Australia's progress under the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. As part of this process, ERA was invited to provide the text on Australia's progress towards gender equality covering an assessment of the measures taken to ensure a whole of government approach to mainstreaming gender policy and the remaining obstacles to achieving substantive equality between men and women

Equality Rights Alliance has circulated this important draft report to members for comment. The eleven page detailed report covers a number of key areas which I have summarised below:

Gender responsive budgeting: Gender responsive budgeting is government planning, programming and budgeting that contributes to the advancement of gender equality and fulfilment of women's rights. Understanding the gender impact of Australia's federal budget is important to ensure that tax, spending and social programmes actually work to improve gender equality. Australia has previously been a world leader in gender responsive budgeting. Yet today the Women's Budget statement is no longer produced by the Federal Government. This lack of comprehensive analysis also leads to conflicting policies. For example, the Federal Government has a stated goal of improving women's economic security but has also announced its intention to reduce penalty rates paid to workers for weekend work which will have a disproportionate effect on the salaries of women who are a majority of workers in the retail sector.

Gendered wage and wealth gap: Australia has a full time gender pay gap of 17.3% averaged across all work sectors. This continues to impose significant barriers to gender equality. In 2016 the Senate Economics References Committee inquired into women's economic security in retirement and found that men's superannuation balances at retirement are on average twice as large as women's putting women at greater risk of poverty, housing stress and homelessness in retirement. Their report also noted that Australian women are more likely than men to work in lower paid jobs, to work part-time or casually and to take breaks from paid employment to provide unpaid care for others. This of course means that over their lifetimes women earn far less than men and therefore retire with far less super. The Senate Committee found that Australia's retirement income system does not adequately accommodate the differences in male and female economic participation and remuneration and favours higher income workers—usually men— who work full time without breaks for the entirety of their working life. The report made 19 recommendations and ERA notes that the majority of these have not been implemented.

ERA's report states that women in Australia are still subjected to high levels of discrimination by employers when pregnant or returning to work after parental leave. **Cont'd p 3**

The Australian Human Rights Commission endorsed this view after a national review of pregnancy and return to work in 2014. ERA believes that paid parental leave is an essential component of any attempt to address the gendered wealth gap and improve women's workforce engagement and notes

that it remains Federal Government policy to reduce the amount of parental leave currently available to Australian women who have access to some employee entitlements in addition to the current Federal paid parental leave scheme entitlement of 18 weeks.

Housing for women: Housing affordability remains a chronic problem in Australia. Affordable rental properties are increasingly unavailable for people on low incomes, the number of people seeking assistance from homelessness services rises every year and the national waiting list for social housing remains at about 200,000. Further nearly 900,000 of the households living in the private rental market satisfy income eligibility tests for public housing pointing to an even greater demand. For women economic insecurity, caused by the gender pay, wealth and superannuation gaps further weakens access to affordable housing. Women are the major beneficiaries of housing support systems. For example, they are the majority of public housing tenants, Commonwealth Rent assistance recipients and specialist homelessness services clients. Domestic violence is one of the leading drivers of homelessness for Australian women and their children. The under-resourcing of housing safety nets disproportionately impacts on women.

Significantly, single older women are emerging as a "poignant symbol of housing insecurity in Australia." Older people in Australia are increasingly facing precarious housing futures with growing numbers of retirees having mortgage debt or living in the private rental market. In particular single women are more likely than single men or couples to be renting or still paying off a mortgage in their retirement. There is an urgent need for a review of Federal Government housing and homelessness policies and funding systems with a view to improving funding adequacy for affordable housing.

Violence against women: The ERA report stresses that: "Violence against women is one of the most extreme manifestations of gender inequality in society and is a serious and pervasive human rights violation in Australia". Evidence shows that on average one or two women a week in Australia is murdered by a current or former partner, one in four women have experienced physical and sexual violence and/or emotional abuse and one in four women have experienced emotional abuse. Thousands more are injured or made to live in fear and more than half a million women report that their children have seen or heard partner violence. However, the true scale of the problem is likely much greater as this violence continues to be severely under-reported.

Despite increased awareness of family violence and the Government's human rights obligations, there is still inadequate, unsustainable and precarious Government funding for specialist family violence support services. These services are essential not only to support and reaffirm women and children's right to live a life free from violence, but also to provide expert advice to legislation and policy reform processes and discussions.

It is clear from ERA's disturbing report that in the twenty-first century inequality and discrimination continue to be experienced by Australian women and girls in every area of their lives. If there are any substantive changes in the final version of the report I will cover these in the next Newsletter.

Mary Owen, OAM

A memorial was held for Mary in Melbourne 27 April. Anne Sgro spoke on behalf of the UAW.

Member **Heather O'Connor**, from Bermagui, sent in this remembrance of Mary .

When I think of the hundreds of women I have known and by whom I have been influenced, perhaps only a dozen stand out as being responsible for huge shifts in my life. Mary Owen was one of those. I first met her outside an inner-city school in the early 1970s, where some life-changing meeting of women was taking place (UN mid-decade??). It was the first big public event I had been game enough to go to, and I was just about to run back to my car and head for Glen Waverley and the safety of suburbia.

Mary was standing on the steps having a smoke, and from memory, actually walked towards me – I like to think she recognized a terrified woman (or a fellow-smoker??) She introduced herself and I nearly fell down dead – I knew about the famous Mary Owen and her research, and now here she was, chatting away and encouraging me to come into the hall and join the campaign. So I stayed - for the next 40 years! It was an event that changed my life; I seriously doubt if I would have entered the hall and joined that daunting crowd if Mary had not taken me under her wing.

When I recounted this to her years later, she of course had no memory of it. But it was a lesson I tried to remember whenever I was with crowds of women – look out for the terrified one about to race back to the car, you could well be starting a long life together as sisters and comrades.

VALE dear comrade and sister.

CELEBRATING AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE: 5 YEARS OF THE STELLA PRIZE

By Anne Sgro

The Stella Prize is a major literary award celebrating Australian women writers, established in response to evidence of the under-representation of women writers as the winners of literary prizes; on book review pages; and on school curricula.

I attended a panel discussion recently at the Wheeler Centre. The participants were:

Sophie Cunningham, Chair, and publisher and writer;

Brenda Walker, Chair of the Judges, novelist and Emeritus Professor;

Heather Rose, winner of 2017 Stella Prize;

Emily Maguire, short-listed author.

The focus on discussion was initially on writing as a career. Maguire had worked in a call centre, at McDonalds, in restaurants – and when she was able to make as much money writing as those jobs provided, she regarded herself as successful financially. Rose had a more varied background but had always fitted writing in “around the edges” of her life. Now she has won thinking time, as she put it, and the strange freedom of having time.

Brenda Walker spoke about the process of choosing a short-list and subsequent winner – it sounded exhausting. 190+ entries, judges from a huge range of backgrounds.

The audience was overwhelmingly comprised of women, but one of the few young men asked a question that caused a vigorous response: To what extent have you felt misogyny and cultural cringe as writers? Both writers participate in the Stella Schools program and raise and respond to these issues.

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY: militant beginnings**Cath Morrison**

The first national Women's Day was organised by The Socialist Party of America in 1909 to commemorate the NY garment workers strike of 1908. German Socialist and feminist activist Clara Zetkin went on to win widespread support at an international socialist conference in Copenhagen in 1910 for an international working women's day to campaign for suffrage. Clara persevered and IWD was marked for the first time on March 19, 1911 by more than 1 million women in Germany, Australia, Denmark and Switzerland.

At a meeting of the Comintern in 1921 it was decided to celebrate IWD on March 8, to honour the Russian female textile workers who had marched on that date in Petrograd in 1917 for "Bread and Peace". The first IWD rally in Australia was organised in Sydney in 1928 by the Militant Women's Group of the Communist Party. Edna Ryan, later a founding member of WEL, took part in that Sydney rally.

The UN began celebrating IWD in 1975 and has now become the familiar worldwide event in which the UAW as well as all other women's organisations proudly participates. From little things big things grow, indeed.

THE QUEEN'S FUND HELPING VICTORIAN WOMEN: Never heard of it?**Cath Morrison**

Neither had I. I was intrigued when I read in the Sunday Age (26/3) about this fund (with its rather off-putting title) and did a bit of research to find out more. It was established in 1887 by Elisabeth Loch, wife of the then Governor of Victoria as *'the chief permanent Jubilee Memorial of Victoria in commemoration of the completion of the Fiftieth year of the Queen's reign, raised by women, managed chiefly by women, for the good of women, and in honour of the long reign of a good woman, during which the general position of women has been in a hundred ways improved'*. (Women's Register).

The Queen's Fund was founded also in response to the worst mining disaster Australia had experienced; an explosion at the Bulli coal mine which killed 81 miners and injured many more. Lady Loch was motivated by a series of articles in The Age about the mine disaster. The Fund celebrated its centenary in 1987. Meetings are held monthly at the Melbourne Town Hall. The present Governor, the Honourable Linda Dessau, AO is the chief patron.

According to their website (<https://www.queensfund.org.au>): *We are one of Victoria's oldest charities, run by women, for women. Through emergency grants up to \$350, we assist Victorian women, and their children, in distress or crisis. Emergency relief helps in one-off situations, but may also assist women to deal with ongoing financial disadvantage. Grants are allocated to women who are referred by community organisations and welfare agencies. 100% of money donated is directed to the women who have been referred to us (an historical bequest covers our overheads).*

It is a pity that a charity such as this one is still needed because government still falls short; nevertheless, this fund does some good stuff for women and perhaps deserves more recognition and support.

THE ANZAC MYTH GROOMS US TO SUPPORT MILITARISATION**By Anne Sgro**

I feel a terrible sadness at Anzac. I think of the senseless slaughter of so many lives, the physical and psychological wounds of war, the destruction, and the stories that don't get told. I am concerned about the glorification and the attempts to make Gallipoli a symbol of nationhood. And I am distraught that our governments never learn the lessons of war.

Peace activist Dr Hannah Middleton spoke recently on behalf of CICD at the Unitarian Church about '**What is wrong with Anzac**'. She spoke of the appalling loss of life: 300,000 Turks; 198,000 – 215 British and Dominion soldiers. The loss led to the Anzac Myth which suggests that Australian soldiers possessed unique qualities of courage, stoicism, larrikinism, and natural egalitarianism. Anzac has been called the birth of Australian nationhood. But we are increasingly presented with a sanitized version of the event. We don't hear of how the soldiers died, just that they "fell"; we don't hear of the disfigurement, suicides, violence; or the carnage inflicted in our name – the soldiers were sent overseas to kill. And there is silence about the colonial troops involved – thousands of indigenous Australians served, Maoris, Sikhs, Gurkhas, Senegalese and others. We hear of 'supreme sacrifice', not that they **were** sacrificed.

When I was young, Anzac Day was a relatively low key affair, and there was ambivalence about it – remember Alan Hoggood's play 'The One Day of the Year'? It was seen as a day for returned soldiers to march with their mates then go to the pub to get drunk. There was little public recognition of the traumatic effects of war, though families saw plenty of it.

The Anzac Myth began to be promoted in the 1980s, firstly by Hawke, then by Keating. But it was most powerfully pushed by the Howard government. There was funding for monuments overseas to honour Australian dead, pilgrimages, educational material to be distributed to schools, essay competitions about what Anzac means to young people, the publication of DVDs, tours to war memorials overseas. There is the professional stage management of the dawn service at Anzac Cove. It is being used to promote unquestioning support for the military and military responses to difficult situations. On 24 April I was in the city, and amazed by the number of soldiers in uniform who were selling poppies and badges – not the members of RSL and the public. Or have I been missing something for years? It is being used to normalize military intervention in foreign wars. The Anzac Myth has become the dominant force in nationalism.

It comes at a time when the United States is making a bid to counter economic decline with military intervention. For example, US missiles were launched in Syria, without proof about where the Sarin gas originated; there is brinkmanship on the Korean Peninsula that may result in catastrophic action in our region. All at a time when the United Nations is moving to ban nuclear weapons, and Australia, to our shame, has decided to boycott those meetings.

The Anzac Myth is a calculated, deliberate distortion of Australian history. Everything before 1915 disappears. Yet we have so much to celebrate. Dr Middleton's list included:

- 1840 end of transportation
- 1854 Eureka Stockade
- 1879 the first Australian Trade Union Congress
- 1901 Federation, May 9

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- 1902 Commonwealth Franchise Act gave women the right to vote and stand for office in federal parliamentary elections
 - 1903 Vida Goldstein became first woman in the British Empire to stand for parliamentary election
 - 1907 Harvester Judgment, a world 1st that set the standard for a minimum living family wage

The wars against indigenous peoples obviously don't enter the story.

It is a recent militaristic view that our national identity has been forged in foreign wars: nations are made in war not in peace, on battlefields not in parliaments, that the bayonet is mightier than the pen. Yet the majority of Australia's nation builders never served in wars. The Australian Constitution was created by men who had never been to war, and the majority of nation builders, including Curtin and Menzies never served in war. Our responsibility needs to be on the side of life, not death. We need stories that abhor war and honour peace and justice.

The Myth has made it easier for Australia to participate in wars, and harder to challenge that participation. There is a relentless focus on military solutions, on war and violence as a means of resolving conflict. The 2003 intervention in Iraq was not supported by the Australian people. We have followed the US and become a pawn in conflicts. Now we have the possibility of conflict in our region because two megalomaniacs with bad haircuts are posturing and threatening. Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has the audacity to lecture North Korea on spending money on the welfare of its people rather than the development of nuclear weapons – hello! What about the billions that Australia spends on submarines and fighter planes – how many school, hospitals, homes... could be built with that? And what about the welfare of those soldiers who have served in recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq? The trauma and suffering does not end for them when they return. Dr Middleton believes that so much has been left out of the carefully constructed Anzac Myth for a vicious purpose: to allow Australia to go to war with no parliamentary debate whenever the US wants. It has no respect for those who will be sent or for those who have died.

Eric Bogle's anti-war song: "And the band played waltzing Matilda" is sad and powerful; there were many people wiping their eyes as the song was sung at the Unitarian Church. But things have changed since he wrote it, singing in relation to Anzac Day parades that "soon no-one will march there at all". Anzac has rather taken on a glorification of a mythical past. People have been sucked in to the Myth.

Senator Nick Xenophon recently had an opinion piece calling for parliamentary debate and decision before Australia supports any military intervention. The UAW has written in the past in support of such a stand. Two letters in *The Age* (25.4.17) were most relevant: one asks readers to 'remember just the dead and wounded'; another quotes Martin Luther King: "We have guided missiles and misguided men" and "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools". I'm on the side of humanity. I challenge the Anzac Myth. I see WW1 for what it was – senseless slaughter and destruction to further the interests of Empire. We have allowed our governments to hold us in thrall to the US and follow America into wars that have resolved nothing but have caused untold suffering and destruction. They have benefitted only the arms manufacturers. Let's do as Hannah Middleton suggests and have a peace oriented approach to the past. She mentioned a Peace Park in Marrickville, and a peace plaque at a Sydney community centre. We need more of these. And maybe a Ministry for Peace? That would be a first.

Celebrating Australian women's literature

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Stella has four main functions:

The celebration, recognition and promotion of 12 excellent books by Australian women

An award of \$50,000 for the winner, and support for all shortlisted candidates.

The Stella Count, to track the number of books by men and women reviewed in our major newspapers and literary magazines, and The Stella School Program.

That Stella is so needed was reinforced to me during the school holidays when my 6 year old grand-daughter showed me a number of her 'readers'. Of the 6 books, not one had a female protagonist. What happened to all that work that we did in the 70s and 80s? Is this what mainstreaming does? No wonder that I am in a constant state of rage and agitation!

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