

Union of Australian Women(Vic.)

Newsletter

WHAT'S ON- SEPTEMBER 2017

8 – 10 September

War, Peace and Independence – Keep Australia out of US wars. See Page 6 August Newsletter.

Book: trybooking.com/286873

ipan.org.au Shirley Winton 0417 456 001

Wednesday 13 September
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Organising Committee

3rd floor meeting room, 3.2 Ross House

Thursday 14 September
1.00 – 3.00

UAW Book Group

2nd floor meeting room Ross House

Wednesday 20 September

UAW Pub Lunch

Change of plan! Instead of Coffee with a Focus, advertised in August's print Newsletter we have decided to welcome spring with an informal catch-up.

12 noon

Royal Oak Hotel

444 Nicholson St North Fitzroy

Tram 96 from Bourke St Stop 18

OCTOBER

Tuesday 24 October
10.30 – 12.30

UAW AGM

4th floor Ross House

Put the date in your diary. Details October Newsletter

INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA- THE LATEST POLITICAL FOOTBALL?

Cath Morrison

Bill Shorten's speech in July 2017 highlighting that inequality was "*the biggest threat to our health as an economy and our cohesion as a society*" was met with denial by the conservatives. Shorten's argument was not that inequality is higher this year than last year – or even five years ago but that it has been clearly rising in the long term. His claim that inequality is as bad now as it has been for 75 years was based on research done by the ALP's assistant treasury spokesperson, Andrew Leigh. Leigh's research is also used in the [World Wealth and Income database](#) set up by French economist Thomas Piketty. That data shows that the share of national income held by the richest 1% is indeed at the highest since the second world war. Treasurer Scott Morrison responded that Shorten was overstating the problem of inequality and that it was "a lie" to say inequality had got worse-nothing to see here...move on -was Morrison's take on this issue. Greg Jericho writing in The Guardian (25/7) noted the support for Morrison from the Australian Financial Review which *laughably argued that we do not have a problem with inequality, and that Labor should look with longing to the time of Bob Hawke when he "forged a consensus around restoring profits and job growth by deliberately cutting real wages"*. *Yep, lower wages, less purchasing power for workers and lower government spending is always the answer.*

Yet, contrary to Morrison's dismissal of the debate, and according to David Hetherington of Per Capita (Australian Quarterly, July 2017): *Inequality is a defining idea of our time. Its personalities and memes are buzzwords of the early 21st century: the oligarchs, Piketty, the 1%, the 99%, unicorns, plutocrats, the precariat. Unusually for an economic idea, inequality has captured the public imagination.* The OECD thinks we should be worried about the issue. In its latest survey on Australia in March, rising inequality was a major focus. It noted that: "*Australia's adjustment to the end of the commodity boom has not been painless. Unemployment has risen, and there are increasing concerns about inequality.*" It also found that in the decade from 2004 to 2014, the tide lifted a hell of a lot faster for the rich than it did the poor. At the micro level every day we see headlines such as "Drastic increase in couch surfing amongst older women" (Lina Ceneva, ProBono News): an 83% rise in four years. An 85% increase since 2012 in women over 50 sleeping in cars. There are so many other examples. How anyone could seriously argue that inequality is not an issue in Australia must live in a very cosy bubble. We should welcome Labor's foray into this debate.

Eva Cox writing in [Australian Quarterly](#), reminds us also that inequality and its solutions are not solely economic.... *most (economic forums) have touted and defended globalised market forces, so are still reluctant to explore, let alone recognise, the failures of their globalised market modes, and so are resistant to the need to do more than some minor economic redistribution to fix it.* In this regard Cox finds the progressives and the conservatives equally resistant to the major changes required to redress inequality in Australia. Cox suggests that we question why there is a surprising consensus across a wide variety of institutions, the media, and other – even radical – groupings, that material inequality is, in itself, somehow primarily responsible for political divides and distrust in many western democratic countries. Cox sees inequality as the symptom of widespread social failure of unfair systems: that gender wage equity, better and cheaper childcare for all, good environmental solutions and better and more public services will also reduce inequality and the sense of unfairness and exclusion felt by many. Many UAW members would agree with Cox's view that the dominance of market based, largely neo-liberal economics has displaced visions of a civil society. She reminds us and the politicians that we live in a society not an economy and that neoliberalism has failed to "lift all boats" as promised and the inequality debate must recognise this. "The paradigm must change"

Regardless of broader views of inequality such as Cox's or more conventional economic views, indisputably rising inequality has been largely driven by Government policy in Australia, which David Hetherington (Australian Quarterly, July 2017) summarised as follows:

- **Tax cuts on income and capital gains, particularly at upper income levels:** In Australia income tax scales have become a lot flatter since the 1980s. In 1984 the top marginal income tax rate was 60%. By 2006 it had fallen to 45%: the income level at which the top rate started went from \$35,000 in 1984 to \$180,000 by 2008, a significant increase.. The raising of the tax free threshold has helped low income groups but the wealthy have had disproportionate gains in tax policy. More dramatic than income tax changes, though, have been the cuts to capital gains tax- a 50% reduction which delivers a net benefit to owners of capital relative those who don't own capital, further lifting inequality.
- **Reduction in value of government transfers relative to income:** For example, unemployment benefits have fallen steadily in real terms. The unemployed in Australia have not had an increase for 20 years in real terms, so the long-term unemployed particularly, continue to slide further behind in income terms, adding to inequality. **Research by The Australia Institute has found that in 2000, a couple on unemployment benefits were right on the poverty line; in 2016 they were 26% below it.**
- **Measures to reduce trade union power:** Union membership averaged almost 50% from 1920 to 1980, and is just 15% today. While not wholly responsible for it, successive Australian governments have taken decisions that expedited this decline, the introduction of enterprise bargaining being just one of these.
- **Privatisation of public assets and services:** Privatisation of electricity in Victoria by Kennett promised lower prices, but electricity prices have risen steadily. Those who own capital (power companies) are benefiting at the expense of the consumer. Major urban roads in Australia used to be free of charge. Now they are privately owned, user-pay toll roads. They provide poor access to work in the CBD at a high cost for commuters from low-income outer suburbs with poor public transport. Inner urban areas populated by wealthier residents use extensive public transport options at a much lower cost.

WHAT COULD AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS DO TO REDUCE INEQUALITY?

Whilst inequality is driven in part by globalisation and inexorable technological change, there is much an Australian government can do. Cut tax concessions on superannuation, capital gains and negative gearing. Restore the link between Newstart and living standards. Work with unions to minimise the effects of casualization and crack down on underpayment of wages. Treat privatisation as a rare public-interest exception, rather than a policy status quo (Hetherington).

In addition, address the town/country and inner urban/outer suburban inequality of services, and amenities; tackle public housing; explore in a serious way a form of universal basic income to replace our flawed social welfare system; redress the gender wage gap and address the challenges of emerging technologies and likely future job losses arising from automation (perhaps through a Universal Basic Income).

The question is not whether the means to reduce inequality are available but whether the political will exists. At least the Labor Party appears to be ready to openly discuss inequality and has some policies to redress it. Whether this will be enough to restore trust in the system is yet to be seen.

As Eva Cox concludes: *we need to rewrite the political agendas to include some hope and vision, to convince people it is possible to fix the system; trust will begin to return when people believe that they can make good change happen.*

SAME SEX MARRIAGE POSTAL VOTE: IT'S DEEPLY FLAWED AND YET WE MUST VOTE

Carmen Green

The full bench of the High Court will hear challenges to the proposed same sex marriage postal vote on 5th and 6th of September, just days before ballots are sent to Australian homes. The challengers argue that the government is acting unconstitutionally in spending \$122 million on the vote and ordering the Australian Bureau of Statistics to run the postal survey. The Government's plebiscite had been twice rejected by the Senate and it is now proceeding with a postal vote without parliamentary approval.

Current research suggests that a significant proportion of Australians—at least two thirds— supports marriage equality. Yet the Federal Government thinks a postal vote is necessary. A postal vote that is not compulsory and nor is it binding on parliament. Senior Coalition MPs, like Eric Abetz, has openly talked of ignoring the results. There is no national precedent for a non-compulsory postal vote. It's simply never happened before.

So what's the point of a postal vote? Its purpose is to keep Turnbull in power and his party from splitting. The majority of Coalition MP's are determined to hold back the advance of marriage equality in Australia and the postal vote is another way to ensure this happens.

Even worse for the LGBTI community is that it has provided a government funded platform for every homophobe in the country to express their derogatory views on gay and lesbian Australians, their families and their relationships. The first weeks of the campaign has confirmed that this is the case.

I didn't think that the anti- gay marriage case would impact on me as much as it has. I have found as I listen to or read their views feelings of both depression and anger at the degree of homophobia being expressed. Other gay and lesbian friends —particularly those with young children- feel even more troubled by the outrageous comments being made. For example Lyle Shelton from the Australian Christian Lobby compared children of same sex partners conceived via surrogacy to "the stolen generation". According to the AGE (23/8/17) material has been circulated in Melbourne and Sydney urging people "to stop the fags" and labelling homosexuality a "curse of death" and a poster in the Melbourne CBD is claiming that 92% of children raised by gay parents are abused. In response to this, the PM says "he deplores the hurtful language being used in the same sex marriage debate and insists the vast majority of Australians are bringing respectful views to the discussion". How can it be "a respectful debate" when those opposed to gay marriage win their case by denigrating the lives of gay and lesbian Australians?

Those on the yes side have to keep insisting that this issue isn't anything other than what it is: *should gay and lesbian adults be allowed to marry the person they love?* It's not about "political correctness", or "a stolen generation of children" or a "gay agenda" or religious "freedoms in schools" or "free speech" or anything else the anti- gay marriage side like to dredge up.

I wish this postal vote wasn't happening but- if it goes ahead -we must vote and make sure that we get an overwhelming **yes** vote so that eventually gay and lesbian adults who love each other will have the same right to marry as heterosexual Australians. Otherwise if the no vote wins, the Tony Abbotts and Peter Duttons of this world will claim their views have triumphed.

LET'S GET ACTIVE!

Anne Sgro

- **WHO THINKS THIS CRUELTY UP?**

Just when you think conditions can't get any more diabolical for asylum seekers, the federal government comes up with a new, appalling strategy – one that is said to surprise even people in the Immigration Department. From Monday 28 August, those who have been transferred to Australia from Manus and Nauru for medical treatment (including, presumably the 37 babies born in Australia) will be given the new "final departure Bridging E Visa", and will have all support cut off. They will, however, be expected to adhere to a Code of Behaviour that sets out "Australian values". I wonder if they are the questionable values held by Minister Peter Dutton? We will be writing to ask him.

In August we wrote re: the government's dodgy deal with the US and his refusal to allow asylum seekers with close family to come to Australia.

It seems unbelievably cruel that a small number of asylum seekers with close family in Australia will not be allowed to settle here. They include 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. What purpose does this cruelty serve?

As Minister, you have powers of discretion at your disposal. The UAW asks that you use those powers for humanity and decency and allow this small group of traumatized people to re-unite with their families in Australia.

A similar letter was sent to Bill Shorten, and to Shadow Minister Shayne Neumann (who is such a shadow that few know who he is).

As Shadow Minister, you have been silent for too long. The Opposition can no longer continue its policy of broad support for cruel government action and secrecy. We hope that the Opposition will find the courage and humanity to intervene, and offer a solution to this group of abandoned people for whose care we are responsible.

So get cracking, members. Writing and telephoning are things we can all do.

- **TREATY ON THE PROHIBITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

On the 7 July, 122 governments voted to adopt the above Treaty (see August Newsletter). It will be open for signature on 20 September. Julie Bishop will be there for the opening of the General Assembly. Although Australia refused to participate in the negotiating conference, we can still sign on. The UAW will again be contacting the Foreign Minister, urging her to join the global majority and reject nuclear weapons. 30 parliamentarians, Labor, Liberal, Greens and National have signed a Parliamentary Pledge promising to work for Australia to sign and ratify the new treaty.

Contact your MP to do the same.

- **WILD WOMEN in Geelong**

This group are "keen to see progressive women candidates elected to Council to ensure: the implementation of Geelong's Our Future strategy, good governance and an inclusive Council culture that values teamwork, transparency and accountability to the electorate. Female candidates-who support these objectives and the aims and principles of the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter of gender equity, active citizenship and diversity-are participating in a Mentoring Support Program. UAW members Yvonne Adami and Jenny Wills are two of the WILD activists who have put their considerable organizing skills, time and energy into the program. (WILD: Women in Local Democracy).

EQUAL PAY DAY 2017: 4 SEPTEMBER

by Carmen Green

Equality Rights Alliance has forwarded information to its members highlighting the importance of raising awareness about Equal Pay Day. Equal Pay Day 2017 will be held on 4 September and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency is hoping to build lots of interest through a social media campaign. Equal Pay Day is a symbolic day marking the additional time from the end of the previous financial year that women must work to earn the same as men. The date is recalculated each year, but stays depressingly stuck around September.

What's happening with the pay gap?

Using Average Weekly Earnings data recently released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics the Agency calculates the national gender pay gap to be **15.3%**, a decrease of 0.9 percentage points over the previous 12-month period. On average, men working full-time earned \$1,638.30 and women earned \$1,387.10 a difference of \$251.20 per week.

The national gender pay gap is the difference between women's and men's average weekly full-time base salary earnings, expressed as a percentage of men's earnings. It is a measure of women's overall position in the paid workforce and does not compare like roles.

It is influenced by a number of factors, including:

- discrimination and bias in hiring and pay decisions
- women and men working in different industries and different jobs, with female-dominated industries and jobs attracting lower wages
- women's disproportionate share of unpaid caring and domestic work
- lack of workplace flexibility to accommodate caring and other responsibilities, especially in senior roles
- women's greater time out of the workforce impacting career progression and opportunities.

In almost every country women are paid less than men. Over a lifetime, the cumulative effect of the gender pay gap and other factors, such as time spent out of the workforce, and unconscious bias, contribute to women retiring with far less superannuation savings and a higher risk of living in poverty in retirement than men. Addressing inequalities in the workplace is not only important in terms of justice, but because gender equality is central to a country's overall economic performance, and has been linked to improved national productivity, innovation and economic growth. Yet despite this the Workplace Gender Equality Agency says removing the gap in Australia could take 50 years.

Libby Lyons, Director of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency said: *"The gender pay gap is a measure of lost potential, showing that women still face barriers to accessing senior and high paying roles. A small improvement over the past year is good news but we need a continued effort to stamp out bias and outdated gender stereotypes."*

Equal Pay Day serves as a wakeup call to women of how far we still have to go to achieve equality in the work place.

See: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/>

RIOTING WOMEN: Melbourne in the Great War

Anne Sgro

I was intrigued recently to read about a series of marches and riots in the streets of Melbourne as working class women and men protested at the price of food, wartime austerity and what they believed was capitalist profiteering. They were reacting to cost-of-living concerns, and were linked, however informally, to the organised labour movement. Crowds gathered at Parliament House in defiance of regulation prohibiting demonstrations, led by long-term socialist activists Lizzie Wallace, Jennie Baines and Adela Pankhurst. I knew little to nothing about these events. I was certainly tired of the slick marketing of World War 1 as a grand gesture towards democracy and patriotism, and was feeling rather riotous myself in regard to the state of politics and policies on a range of issues. So I did a bit of research.

I came across a paper by Judith Smart, Principal Fellow at the University of Melbourne and an adjunct professor at RMIT University. She had spoken to a meeting of the Brunswick Coburg Anti-conscription Commemoration Committee 3 May 2016.

“By 1917 retail prices of food and groceries in Melbourne had increased by 28.2% overall. Wages had not kept pace.” There were high levels of unemployment in Victoria, and grain and meat were being requisitioned for Britain. This meant not only shortages for local people but, because of inadequate shipping and storage, grain destined for Britain was left at the wharves, to rot and be contaminated by mice.

On 15 August, in the afternoon. “for want of any action by state or federal governments, Adela Pankhurst led a crowd of 2-3,000 to the steps of Parliament House in Spring St, in defiance of a War Precautions regulation prohibiting such gatherings passed only the previous evening.”

On 19 September a torchlight procession was led and organised by the Women’s Peace League. There were up to 10,000 participants at one stage. The two women carrying red flags at the lead were arrested, and the protest turned into a melee. The riot act was read, windows were smashed, metal pickets were thrown. Adela Pankhurst: “It appeared to me that laws which compelled (the people) to see their food destroyed by damp and vermin while their children were in want, did violate the conscience... **We have a perfect right to break the law, if the law is not made in the interest of humanity.**” (My emphasis: Shades of Sally McManus?)

The Women’s Political Association and Peace Army did not officially support the street demonstrations about the costs of living and the violent methods used by Adela Pankhurst and Jennie Baines...the WPA declared solidarity with the wharf labourers who first took decisive action on the cost-of-living issue on 29 July by resolving not to load foodstuffs for shipment overseas, except where they were for war purposes ‘until the cost of commodities was reduced to pre-war rates’”.

As Smart writes, “The traditional food riot was very much a female protest. It was women who noticed the first pangs of hunger in their families and who had to deprive themselves, thief, lie, prostitute their bodies and ultimately spill over into a riot.” I was fascinated and cheered by this blast from the past, and shall continue my reading on the subject of women and activism.

VALE, FIONA RICHARDSON Victorian Minister for Women, and Australia's first Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence.

Like many others, I was stunned to hear of her sudden death. She was a brave woman, not only standing up for the safety of women and children, but having the courage to tell her own story. She made a huge difference, and we are sorry at her passing.

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