

Union of Australian Women(Vic.)

Newsletter

WHAT'S ON-APRIL 2018

Tuesday 10 April
1.00 – 3.00

UAW Book Group
UAW office, Ross House
(Meet for lunch at 12 noon at the Japanese cafe opposite Ross House).

Wednesday 18 April
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Organising Committee meeting
2nd floor meeting room Ross House

ASYLUM SEEKERS

UAW letter to Minister Dutton re the forcible removal of a Sri Lankan family from their home. March 2018.

What has Australia become? It was with disbelief and horror that members of my organisation learnt of the recent forced removal of a Sri Lankan refugee family from their home in the community of Biloela, Queensland to the Melbourne Immigration Transit Authority in Melbourne. It was done in the early hours of the morning, with no warning, and no time to prepare.

The removal involved police officers, Border Force officials and Serco guards. It was obviously calculated to intimidate and frighten people who have been living peacefully in their community for some time. This behaviour would have to be described as thuggish at best, at worst as fascist.

Who authorized this action? Was it a directive from your Ministry? It is an absolute disgrace that people should be treated in this way. NOT IN OUR NAME!

VALE: VAL MACAROW (see p 6)

WHY WOMEN'S HISTORY MATTERS

Report by Anne Sgro

We celebrated both International Women's Day and Women's History Month by inviting UAW member Emeritus Professor Patricia Grimshaw to be our speaker. She stated that women have been excluded from western history which has been largely about empire, male politics and the occasional woman. Women were agents of history but haven't been noticed. They were acted upon in ways different from men.

Academic history has focused on the male, with women's history being marginalized. The message has largely been - do social history if you want women. Pat stated that **Creating a Nation 1788-1990**, (1994) a collaborative history written by herself, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly was reviewed and read as a 'women's history'. She also edited a book of letters written over time by Aboriginal women - to politicians, to mission bodies... to establish their situation and ask for assistance. It is documented as a primary source, but never mentioned by academia. It apparently does not fit in to the mainstream. Men of the Left are often suspicious of what they see as 'bourgeois feminism' considered to be divisive.

But many talented young women are taking on the task of including women, and it seems obvious that history must include women's stories in the narrative, that an inclusive history is a better history - women are, after all, half the population. It is also important for girls and women to have a documented, gendered past. She said that young women get excited when they hear stories that they didn't know.

What might we do as ordinary citizens? Pat and UAW's Cath Morrison were part of the Women's Heritage Committee that sought solutions to keeping records of women's histories. As we have documented in previous articles, the two heritage committees formed into one - HerPlace Museum, which was supported by the Premier who wanted to set up an establishment fund for a women's museum. It has had a small number of exhibitions to keep it alive and to keep funding coming, and it deserves support. But where to put private documents? The State Library took former Premier Joan Kirner's papers - but she was high profile. The fact is that to set up an archive, to preserve and digitise documents is extremely expensive and a solution not easily found.

One thing that can be done is oral history. Pat herself has worked with others on an oral history of working mothers, including in the manufacturing sector. Everyone had 'an almost heroine story' of how they managed, and the stories affirmed women's resilience and determination. She has also worked with the Corranderrk community at Healesville.

The National Foundation of Australian Women, working with the National Library, has established the Australian Women's Register. It is a successful, user-friendly site that gets thousands of hits a week but the IT work cannot be done by volunteers. Union women are 'saving the stories of Australian women unionists before they are lost to history': <https://chuffed.org/project/save-womens-stories>. Pat mentioned that a friend is writing a biography of Muriel Heagney, who died in poverty having sold many of her papers to a pawn shop - that no biography had been written of her. (*There is, in fact a considerable chapter devoted to Heagney in The Changemakers: Ten significant Australian women, by Suzane Fabian and Morag Loh 1983*). Pat urged us to keep our own records, to look for where they can be preserved/ digitised. It was an informative, encouraging, interesting presentation that generated good discussion. We will follow up.

HOMELESSNESS INCREASED BY 14% SINCE 2011:PUBLIC HOUSING CRISIS

Cath Morrison

The Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released new data from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing on Wednesday March 14, 2018. It estimated that 116,427 people were experiencing homelessness on census night in 2016, a 13.7 per cent increase compared to the 2011 figure of 102,439 people. It's probably much more than that!

People living in "severely" crowded dwellings, which require four or more extra bedrooms to accommodate those usually living there, was cited as the greatest contributor to the national increase. Dr Paul Jelfs, the general manager of population and social statistics at ABS, said in 2016 this group accounted for 51,088 people, up from 41,370 in 2011. "On census night, 8,200 people were estimated to be 'sleeping rough' in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out – an increase from 3.2 persons per 10,000 people in 2011 to 3.5 persons per 10,000 people in 2016," Jelfs said.

Younger Australians emerged as a group experiencing increased homelessness rates while older Australians also experienced a homelessness increase, with the rate of people aged between 65 and 74 years experiencing homelessness rising to 27 persons per 10,000 people, up from 25 persons per 10,000 people in 2011.

Jeff Fiedler from HAAG had a great letter in The Age (17/3) highlighting in the context of the Census data, the "staggering" lack of services to help older people find housing. He said that HAAG's Home at Last Service, with 60-70% of clients being older women on pensions is now "inundated with requests for assistance". Older women particularly are facing trauma and illness after being evicted from the private rental market where insecure leases and high rents force them out. Federal leadership in this area is urgently needed.

The social welfare sector is united in calling for urgent action on this crisis as Luke Michael reported in ProBono on March 14, 2018. (<https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news>)

Mission Australia CEO James Toomey said he was "not at all surprised" by the homelessness rate rise. "It is an international embarrassment caused by the long-term absence of a national co-ordinated plan and the lack of a serious commitment to building new social and affordable homes. We cannot afford to ignore this situation any longer. "To even begin to house those who are in need, we require the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to commit to the building of 300,000 new social homes and 200,000 affordable rental properties across Australia by 2030. Mission Australia called for a 30 per cent increase in the maximum value of Rent Assistance for all payment recipients to address rental stress and lessen the risk of homelessness

Dr Cassandra Goldie, the CEO of the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), said the government needed to address the conditions increasing poverty and inequality in Australia to address homelessness. Inadequate incomes and unaffordable housing are forcing people into homelessness, as shown by today's figures. Children with their parents, young people, workers, and older people are living in cars, in boarding houses and on other people's couches. "We hear over and over from people staring down the barrel of homelessness because they cannot afford to pay for essentials. People are choosing between feeding themselves or their children; paying an energy bill or covering the cost of dental care."

The St Vincent de Paul National Council said that these figures from the ABS showed "a frightening picture of homelessness across Australia".

"It is now time for the federal government to show real leadership and make some brave decisions to end homelessness in our rich country," the council's CEO Dr John Falzon said. "We have to move away from seeing homelessness only as an individual problem and understand that it is the way that we organise our society that makes homelessness for some almost impossible to avoid.

Housing crisis in Tasmania

Rental accommodation in Tasmania, particularly in Hobart is at crisis point as well according to several reports on the ABC. Families are camping at the Hobart showgrounds in Glenorchy. President Scott Gadd said "I've probably only got a dozen or so or even less now, families and individuals and couples out there. But what's become apparent is that's only the tip of the iceberg. There are so many people ... I've got one lady who's almost given up on public housing, she's probably been here over a year now and she's got her daughter and her boyfriend in a tent near her," Mr Gadd said. "She's been told it'll be a five to 10 year waiting list, so I suspect we're going to have her for a long time." He said welfare agencies were "referring people" to him and "they're sending them here with tents".

The social welfare sector has admitted it is at a loss to solve Tasmania's housing crisis and the situation has been described as "critical" by Hobart City Mission CEO John Stublely.

The homelessness situation across every State in Australia is grim. The 2017 Federal Budget's new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) with the states initiative is a start but still grossly underfunded according to The Conversation, May 12, 2017. "In reality, properly funding the growth and maintenance of our social and affordable housing stock will require more than what the federal government is offering". After much lobbying by the social welfare sector the Federal National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) was extended for another 12 months in 2017. It's funding is insecure and insufficient to meet the vast chasm of social housing need in this country.

How can the cycle of poverty and homelessness and disadvantage ever be broken when children have to struggle to go to school from their overcrowded house, caravan or even tent in the worst case? When elderly women are couch surfing or sleeping in cars. How is it possible that these conditions exist in this wealthy country? The Federal Government has a responsibility to provide leadership, a national housing strategy and the necessary increase in funding to provide sufficient public housing.

So bad is the situation in this country that ACOSS in an unusual action has petitioned the Senate not to pass the company tax cuts which it describes as "unconscionable" when people on Newstart who are often homeless and starving get no increases of any significance..

The Government must take urgent action on this issue which reflects and causes greater inequality in our society. The Coalition obviously doesn't see this as a priority. Let's make sure the Labor Party does! They will have a \$\$\$ war chest from various policy decisions they have announced.

Please write/email Bill Shorten or your local Labor MP urging Labor to make increasing public housing an urgent priority when they are elected

MOLLY HADFIELD SOCIAL JUSTICE ORATION 2018

by Carmen Green

The key event to celebrate International Women's Day for the City of Darebin is the Molly Hadfield Social Justice Oration. This is a free public community event held annually in celebration of International Women's Day. The event is a tribute to well-known Darebin resident and UAW member, Molly Hadfield OAM who worked tirelessly to advance women's and seniors rights throughout her life. This year's oration was delivered by gender transcendent diva, cabaret artiste, jazz singer and community activist, Mama Alto. The evening was held on IWD 8 March and also included MC, Sherry-Rose Bih, and performer, Violet Tolhurst.

It was an honour to attend the function on behalf of the UAW – I was very proud to be able to say that Molly was a friend. The celebration was held in the Northcote Town Hall with a very large and enthusiastic audience of mainly young women.

Mama Alto started with a performance of "Somewhere over the rainbow" which she sang so beautifully that I think everyone wished that she'd just keep on singing. But we were only allowed one song before she started on her very well researched oration. The oration explored the IWD theme- "Press for progress", with a focus on the binary nature of gender, its construction and the ways in which this negatively impacts women, especially trans women. The assumption that gender is binary is increasingly being questioned and many feminists now regard it as being instead on a continuum of male and female.

Before she began, she acknowledged the traditional owners of the land and the necessity for the inclusion of indigenous women's voices in our feminism. She said that in delivering the Molly Hadfield Oration she recognised her outstanding work as an activist, humanitarian and advocate and honoured her achievements in advancing the rights of women and seniors. She noted that the Molly Hadfield Social Justice Oration has a history of highlighting diverse women's voices. This has included voices for indigenous women and women of colour. Within that context Mama Alto spoke as a trans and gender diverse woman on the issues which effect and often threaten the lives of trans women.

Her talk focused on the causes which Molly championed: notably housing and homelessness; domestic violence; social isolation; and economic inequality. Mama Alto said that these 4 issues disproportionately impacted the lives of trans women. Trans women are refused housing and employment because of their transness and suffer high levels of domestic violence and social isolation.

Mama Alto defined transgender or trans as not identifying with the gender you were assigned at birth and to be cisgender or cis is to identify with the gender you were assigned at birth. They use "trans" and "cis" because it is much better than saying "trans" and "normal".

She believes that trans misogyny is an extension of misogyny. Trans women face terrible dangers –globally a trans woman is murdered every 3 days in acts of transphobic violence. Being visibly trans is a constant negotiation of personal safety.

These experiences create poor mental health outcomes for trans women in Australia e.g. 35% of trans people have attempted suicide in Australia compared to 3% of the general population. She stressed that being trans does not cause poor mental health but discrimination does.

Many of the negative, harmful and dangerous discriminations against trans women would she said be eased if trans women were recognised as real women. Mama Alto said that whilst gender is at some level a socially constructed concept, gender is still innate and stems from internal self –recognition. And so within the 2018 IWD’s theme of “Press for Progress” Mama Alto’s oration emphasised the importance of recognising that trans women are real women.

There are however cis gendered women who insist that trans women are not women and cannot be recognised as real women and that these claims pose a threat to female identity for cis women. Mama Alto stresses that expanding the definitions of womanhood does not erode the rights of other women. She quotes black feminist Angela Davies who said that expanding feminist movements does not weaken feminism but strengthens it.

Mama Alto referred to other examples of how the female “norm” has excluded others –white rather than black, heterosexuality rather than homosexuality and now “normal” cisgender not transgendered.

She stressed that the problem is not trans women –the problem is toxic masculinity, male privilege, patriarchal power structures and male violence which is enabled by entrenched misogyny. We must recognise trans misogyny as an extension of misogyny. Mama Alto believes that feminism should press for progress for all women by acknowledging the unique and diverse complexities of women of all kinds and from all circumstances.

She urges us to help the push to ensure that being transgender is decriminalised and destigmatised throughout the world and said that we must include trans women in our feminism, in our activism and in our advocacy. In conclusion Mama Alto said that we must:

Persist Survive Resist and Thrive.

*For those who would like to read Mama Alto’s complete oration see:
<http://www.mamaalto.com/2018mollyhadfieldoration>*

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Vale: VAL MACAROW who passed away recently. Val was a long-time member of the UAW, particularly active in the Southern Branch. She was active in women’s liberation and the peace movement. She was committed to human rights and social justice.

A CONVERSATION IS BEGINNING: Planning, infrastructure and sustainability

By Anne Sgro

There has been recent discussion on both ABC's Four Corners and later in the week on Jon Faine's Conversation Hour about population and sustainable development. I'm pleased that a sensible discussion has begun, although this conversation tends to focus on population, a 'Big Australia' and how many people i.e. migrants, we might want/need. It is a question for states as well as Australia as a whole.

I'd like to go a step back. Planning in Australia has become a grab-as-you-go kind of situation. Too often it is directed and led by developers and large corporations. Melbourne's urban sprawl, for example, is becoming unmanageable and ad hoc. The circumference of the city is huge, but too often housing comes first with infrastructure, schools, open space, transport an after-thought. A glaring example, in the inner city, were the changes that then Planning Minister Matthew Guy made to zoning at Fisherman's Bend, a decision that provided a huge windfall for his wealthy mates but made no provision for infrastructure, parks or transport. Developers have deep pockets and huge profits are to be made; politicians have too often been willing to accept their donations. What influence does this provide? A form of corruption, I'd say. The increase in high rise apartments in the inner city areas is also going apace, often against the wishes of the local communities and their councils, and too often with minimal standards. How is it possible that so much illegal, poor quality dangerous cladding has been placed on the buildings? Why have rooms been built without access to daylight? Where is the planning authority that should be dealing with these issues? Why is the development of public housing being made into public-private partnerships that will sell off valuable public land for a minimal increase in public housing, but give windfalls to private developers? And what about meeting the needs of various age-groups? In the Netherlands, when a new development goes up, a certain percentage must be tagged for older citizens - no such thought is given here, to say nothing about meeting the housing needs of a variety of people. Public housing? Desperately needed but not on the agenda in any real way.

And why is there no real planning for public transport? There may well be a need, for example, for a second crossing of the Yarra near the Westgate Bridge. But why has the government accepted a proposal, unsought, from Transurban, to build a tunnel that many experts say will flood West and North Melbourne with traffic – though it will bring huge profits to that corporation for years to come from tolls. Why was that not part of an overall plan for the future? Why were no other proposals sought? Both main political parties have failed to provide Melbourne with a transport system that meets today's needs, let alone plans for the future.

As Nicholas Lowe, Professorial Fellow in Urban and Environmental Planning at Melbourne University states *"More and more crucial planning decisions for both land use and transport have been taken out of the hands of expert planners, leaving politicians to determine the future of our growing city"* (Age 12.3.18) He is calling for a Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Authority under its own Act of Parliament to advise government and work to a 10-year plan. I'd support that.

A Conversation is beginning...cont'd

Lack of water is identified as a reason for limiting our intake of people. But governments do little to harness the water we have – why do we flush toilets with pristine drinking water? Why don't we harness storm water rather than let it wash out to sea? Why can't we utilise our rivers for the benefit of many without corruption and theft? Hello Barnaby Joyce re the Murray Darling Basin where wealthy corporations have allegedly stolen water at the expense of the broader community.

Lowé calls for a 'well-funded Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Authority under its own Act of Parliament with responsibility to advise governments on the following metropolitan matters: the probable growth and location of population, the best and most cost-effective way to provide for people's mobility, the siting of schools, housing provision and affordability, the protection and management of open space, the need for heritage and cultural protection, and the climate change impact of all of these tasks.' Hear, hear! State and Federal governments should be taking action along these lines.

If we want a sustainable future it has to be planned. How do we want to live in a fair, organized way? Perhaps that is a first step in this conversation about population.

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