

Union of Australian Women(Vic.)

Newsletter

WHAT'S ON - DECEMBER 2018

Best wishes to all our members and friends for the festive season.

Thank you for your continued support and generosity. We hope that you have a peaceful and enjoyable time, and look forward to campaigning with you in 2019.

Wednesday 5 December
12 noon

UAW Pub Lunch
Royal Oak Hotel
444 Nicholson St North Fitzroy
96 tram from Bourke St. Stop 18
Join us for an end of year get-together

Monday 10 December

Human Rights Day
The 70th anniversary of the day in 1948 when the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

JANUARY

Wednesday 23 January
12 noon

UAW Pub Lunch
Royal Oak Hotel (Address above)

UAW membership for 2019 is now due. Online Membership Renewal (\$20) forms are on the website. (<http://www.uaw.org.au/MembershipApplicationForm.php>)
The form is easy to use in conjunction with EFT payments.

Or send us a cheque with a note. Thanks to all who have already renewed.
We so value your membership and rely on your support

MAJOR LANDMARKS IN GAY RIGHTS- but still a way to go
Morrison

by Cath

The first anniversary of the landmark “YES” vote to allow gay marriage was on November 17, 2018 one year after Federal Parliament passed the enabling legislation to reverse John Howard’s legislation explicitly banning gay marriage.

To mark the anniversary of the “YES” vote Premier Dan Andrews announced on November 17, 2018 that Melbourne will hold a major gay Pride Festival in 2021 to mark the 40 years since Victoria decriminalised homosexuality. This event will be international -and having had the experience of witnessing a Pride event in London- it could be huge. This event will be in addition to the Midsumma Festival in January/February each year.

What a lot has happened since the dark days when LGBTI people risked criminal sanctions because of who they loved -homosexuality wasn’t legal in Victoria until 1981 and males faced the death penalty until 1949- apparently women were overlooked as being without sexual inclinations- another sign of those times! However two brave women were charged in the 70’s with offensive behaviour. Daniel Andrews speaking in Parliament during the formal Apology to LGBTI people debate in 2016 said: *“Speaker, as part of this process, I learnt that two women were convicted for offensive behaviour in the 1970s for holding hands on a tram... So let me finish by saying this: If you are a member of the LGBTI community, and there’s someone in your life that you love – a partner or a friend – then do me a favour: next time you’re on a tram in Melbourne, hold their hand. Do it with pride and defiance. Because you have that freedom.”*

Victoria is the only State in Australia to have made a formal apology to LGBTI people. The previous Government under Napthine had moved to have gay crimes expunged from the record and the formal apology was the culmination of that process. The rainbow flag flew over Parliament House during the debate.

What a long and painful fight for equality it has been. Many gay people have been damaged in the struggle. The Plebiscite in late 2017 was for many people quite traumatic. Several couples I know felt so threatened for the mental health of their children by the deluge of hate and nastiness everywhere that they were most distressed during the campaign and they and their children possibly damaged in the process. We need to remember that 40% of people voted against these human rights for gays and were vociferous in their abusive campaign leading up to the vote.

As Timothy Jones, writing in *The Conversation* said: *For very many LGBT people, the postal survey was a deeply traumatic time. Many still live with the ongoing grief of having had the dignity of their lives, and those of their children, up for debate. But the passage of marriage equality legislation was not the end of this episode in our history. Our communities are still healing after the bruising campaign, and its aftermath has exposed a legal and social landscape in which the human rights of LGBT people are still not adequately valued and respected. The postal survey forced the majority of Australians to reflect on their values around sexuality, relationships and humanity. The clear majority of Australians came to the conclusion LGBT people are just as human as all other Australians. We decided LGBT people deserve the same opportunities for joy and loss, commitment and recognition, and protection under the law, that marriage provides. (Cont next page)*

There are a number of examples where gay people do not have equal rights. Harmful and discredited practices such as LGBT conversion therapy- futile attempts to make LGBT people straight - are still present in many Australian religious communities, and remain legal. The Ruddock Inquiry into Religious Freedom has (perhaps inadvertently) made everyone aware of the ways current law permits religious bodies to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. Teachers can be sacked or refused employment because of their sexual preference. **We must renegotiate the balance of rights between the protection of LGBT people from discrimination and the permission we give religious bodies to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.** The latest salvo in this argument was that gay people were OK in religious schools as long as they lived a long way from the school and were not open.

Nevertheless, there are gains. At least 5000 gay marriages have been celebrated since December 2017. Some have been high profile, such as that of Tony Abbott's sister Christine to her long term partner. Many such as my own have been celebrated joyfully but quietly with our children and grandchildren after a 30-year committed relationship. Many of our friends have married and there have been tears and great celebrations in these larger ceremonies. Many have been living in a committed relationship for over 25 years and have been waiting impatiently to be able to legalise their relationship. One couple we know were very upset because their Church, where they had been long term members, could not marry them.

However, as Timothy Jones points out that : *LGBT people still have mixed and changing views about marriage. Former high court judge, Michael Kirby expressed these ambivalences well recently, when he and his partner, Johan van Vloten, announced their decision to marry: "we've been together now for 49 years and eight months. And so it just seemed a little artificial. It seemed a little late for the confetti. And it also seemed to us a little bit patriarchal... (but) we've ultimately decided that we are going to get married"* Many LGBT people share this view and are not all are rushing to the altar. That is not the point. The point is that gay couples can now CHOOSE if they wish to marry or if not - it is not compulsory- and those couples who have had a strongly held view for a long time that marriage is not an institution they wish to be part of will not marry. This is how it is for the straight community and now it is the same for the gay community. Equality!

Speaking personally, it seemed to us that our right to marry- which had been so hard fought for- should be celebrated and that we should not miss this opportunity to show that our long term relationship was the equal of any other and enjoyed the same legal rights as other married couples.

Since gay marriage became a reality, many of us have observed a subtle but definite shift in public attitudes toward gay couples. A greater respect perhaps; or at least a recognition that this is a legal relationship and is worthy of the same treatment as other married couples. One hopes that this attitude has permeated throughout Australian society. It will be a wonderful thing if changed attitudes make living as an out and proud gay person bearable for young gay people, far too many of whom have suicided in the past because of bullying and rejection by family and society. Our task now is to ensure that some members of the community are not left out of the celebrations of equal rights. Let's campaign to ensure that discrimination by religious bodies is no longer tolerated and that gay conversion therapy is made illegal.

(NB: The Australian Labor Party has just announced that, if elected, as now seems even more likely , it will make discrimination against gay kids illegal(Samantha Maiden, New Daily 27th Nov., 2018)

RETIRING INTO POVERTY – A NATIONAL PLAN FOR CHANGE: Increasing Housing Security For Older Women
by Carmen Green

*The following summary has been taken from the Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) website:
<https://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au>*

ERA is Australia's largest women's network advocating for women's equality, women's leadership and recognition of women's diversity. They bring together 61 women's organisations –including the Union of Australian Women- interested in advancing women's equality. In late 2017 the Mercy Foundation brought together a National Working Group consisting of housing and homelessness policy leaders, researchers and practitioners to examine national policies that need change and advocate for more effective strategies so that older women can access affordable, safe, secure and appropriate housing and enjoy good health as they age. Older single women are one of the fastest growing groups of people experiencing homelessness and most of them have never been homeless before. The National Working Group identifies the underlying systemic and compounding causes of older women's homelessness, examines the devastating impact of gendered economic inequality and the key policy areas that require attention.

It calls for and outlines a national agenda for action to address the alarming 31% rise in homelessness amongst older women between the 2011 and 2016 censuses and the incredible 97% increase in the number of older women forced to rent in an increasingly unaffordable private market over the 10-year period to 2016. ERA was pleased to be a part of the National Older Women's Housing and Homelessness Working Group. They joined a coalition of community organizations, advocates and researchers calling for action on this urgent issue. The Working Group has released a report setting out a roadmap for change with a series of recommendations to our national decision-makers.

BACKGROUND – OLDER SINGLE WOMEN ARE VULNERABLE TO HOUSING INSECURITY

Australian women aged over 50 are at greater risk of financial and housing insecurity than older men. This has been linked to a number of compounding and systemic factors. Women in this older age group today did not benefit from compulsory superannuation at the beginning taken time of their working lives; they were more likely to have been paid at a lower rate than their male counterparts and were likely to have taken time out of the paid workforce to have children and fulfil caring roles.

Wages: In 1950 the basic wage for females was set at 75% of the basic wage for males. Additionally, a significant number of women in the cohort currently aged over 70 were required to resign their paid employment upon marriage. Women now aged over 60 were also then either required or expected to leave paid work when they became pregnant.

Housing costs: People who do not own a home and who are living on a low income, such as a Centrelink benefit, are not able to afford to rent privately or purchase a home. The National Rental Affordability Index² shows a severely unaffordable private rental market for single aged pensioners and Newstart recipients. **The decimation of social housing portfolios across all Australian States and Territories and the increasing cost of renting and home purchase have resulted in the demand for affordable housing far exceeding current supply.**

One of the key issues highlighted by the report was women's lack of superannuation as a result of being out of the workforce raising children and caring for family. A few weeks after the report was launched in Canberra, Opposition Leader Bill Shorten pledged a \$400 million plan to deliver top-up payments for thousands of women (or men) on parental leave. As ERA said in their report this was a great start to addressing this issue. It's also surely a reason for hope that the report will be further considered & appropriate action taken to alleviate this housing crisis for women after the ALP wins next year's federal election.

HOW GOVERNMENT POLICIES ENTRENCH HOMELESSNESS by Cath Morrison

Carmen Green's report in this issue (p.4) summarising the outcomes of ERA's National Working Group looking at the housing crisis for older women sets out the parameters of the issue in Australia of unaffordable housing. One of the major problem areas identified was **housing costs**.

The very high housing prices in this country are a direct result of government policies.

Michael Pascoe, writing in *The Age*, had a great article recently on how Government policies encourage household borrowing for property investment which drives up prices. As he says: *Australia's household debt-to-income ratio is a regular source of scary headlines. What's much less understood is that we're being driven to the top of the debt pile by government policy. And, in the process, it is effectively government policy to make our housing among the world's most expensive. Low interest rates since the GFC have encouraged much greater borrowing throughout the developed world. Throw cheap money at Australians and they're guaranteed to compete for housing, driving up prices. In Australia we are unique in that the vast majority of our rental housing is provided by households – "mum and dad" landlords.*

Peter Mares, author of ***No Place Like Home: Repairing Australia's Housing Crisis***, says the government is subsidising the private rental market ineffectively and inefficiently through negative gearing, the capital gains tax discount and Commonwealth Rent Assistance, collectively costing more than \$16 billion a year in forgone tax revenue and budget outlays.

These policies encourage households to borrow to invest in housing stock and the negative gearing policies of the Government effectively subsidise rentals in an expensive and ineffective way. Changes to negative gearing and the capital gains discount will keep prices from escalating out of control.

Public housing investment must take the place of these policies. Peter Mares has cited Canada as an example of a country prepared to get serious about housing affordability. "Ottawa is spending C\$4.8 billion to increase the quality and supply of public and social housing provided by provincial governments and community organisations, and putting another C\$11.1 billion into a National Housing Co-Investment Fund offering low-interest loans to build affordable housing for the private rental market," he has reported. Government and build-to-rent housing is relatively rare here, unlike in much of the developed world. The central finding of a new research report on the housing infrastructure needs of low-income earners, published by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) is that 25 years of inadequate investment has left Australia facing a shortfall of 433,000 social housing dwellings. The current construction rate – little more than 3,000 dwellings a year – does not even keep pace with rising need, let alone make inroads into today's backlog.

Much more needs to be done and the Victorian government's announcement of 1000 new public housing units, whilst welcome, is still inadequate to meet the need.

Australia continues to muddle along with shrinking public housing and token efforts around the fringes for financing non-profit affordable housing. If negative gearing is wound back after the election of a Labor Government next year, I hope some of the savings can go to Federal public housing construction to help meet the dire housing needs of low income earners.

PROFESSOR JOSEPH STIGLITZ WINS THE 2018 SYDNEY PEACE PRIZE! by Carmen Green

On Thursday the 15 November at Sydney Town Hall, American economist, Nobel Laureate & lifelong champion for global justice, Professor Joseph Stiglitz accepted the 2018 Sydney Peace Prize. His Sydney Peace Prize Citation states: *For leading a global conversation about the crisis caused by economic inequality, for exposing the violence inflicted by market fundamentalism, and for championing just solutions to the defining challenge of our time: How can we break the cycle of power and greed to enable all peoples & the planet to flourish'.*

Inequality is created: Professor Stiglitz highlights this fact with a simple concept: "Today's gilded age of the 1% is undermining the future of the 99%". Equality is the biggest challenge facing our world today –around the world the gap between rich & poor is spiralling wider each year. Oxfam recently reported that 82% of all growth in global wealth in the last year went to the top the top 1 per cent –the bottom half of humanity saw no increase at all. Stiglitz: "Wealth begets power, which begets more wealth".

While this system is unfair, it is not accidental or inevitable. Stiglitz tells us that inequality is the result of deliberate policy choices by people in power but this also means that a solution is not out of reach: our governments can end the inequity crisis if they choose to do so.

When the world's richest hold an unacceptable concentration of wealth and power whilst hundreds of millions fight to survive, we are all diminished and lose sight of our common humanity. Joseph Stiglitz's work makes clear that society cannot function without shared prosperity, and shows us a path towards a better future where the economic system works for everyone, not just the 1%.

The 2018 Sydney Peace Prize Jury observed that a broken economic system is concentrating more wealth in the hands of the rich and powerful, fuelling an inequality crisis that leaves ordinary people struggling to scrape by, both in developing nations where people face extreme poverty, and in developed countries such as Australia. *Australia Institute research shows that over the long run inequality in Australia is getting worse, and getting worse faster than in other developed countries. Over the past 20 years only the top 10% of taxpayers are seeing their share of income rise. It is time to take rising inequality seriously and to implement policies to stop the decline before further economic & social damage is done to our economy & society.*

Professor Stiglitz welcomed the Prize: *"It is a tremendous honour to receive this recognition. It comes at a time not only when there is growing recognition of the magnitude of the crisis in capitalism and democracy caused by the Great Divide in our societies, but the political and economic consequences are being felt world-wide. We cannot have durable peace without social and economic justice, and our political and economic system today is failing to create a world with such justice. Another world is possible – one marked by greater equality, more democratic participation, and stronger and more sustainable growth. We know the economic and social policies with which we can attain this better world. The challenge today is our politics."* Professor Stiglitz also spoke in Melbourne at the Wheeler Centre & the Athenaeum Theatre but his sessions were immediately booked out.

However, you can still hear him speak by watching his address to the National Press Club in Canberra see: <https://www.npc.org.au/>

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