

Union of Australian Women(Vic.)

Newsletter

WHAT'S ON – May 2018

Sunday 6 May
Assemble 1.00

May Day March.
Cnr Victoria and Russell Sts, opposite Trades Hall
Followed by May Day Concert and speakers

Wednesday 9 May
12 noon

UAW Pub Lunch
Enjoy a catch-up and celebrate Yvonne Smith's
90th birthday!
Royal Oak Hotel
444 Nicholson St North Fitzroy
96 tram from Bourke St, Stop 18

Wednesday 16 May
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Organising Committee meeting
2nd floor meeting room Ross House

Saturday 19 May
3.00

WAR NEVER AGAIN
Rod Quantock opening
Steps Gallery, 62 Lygon St
Artists include Michael Leunig, Lyn Hovey,
Arthur Boyd, Terry Denton, Bill Kelly.
Sponsored by ICAN and Medical Association for
the Prevention of War

Want to find a home for those books that you have been meaning to clear out? The New International Bookshop has its Big Red Book Fair on Trades Hall Saturday 2 June, 10.00 – 5.00. They will pick up donations: 9662 4744; nibscoordinator@gmail.com

AUSTRALIA'S #ME/TOO

Anne Sgro

Sally Warhaft chaired a recent discussion at the Wheeler Centre that discussed Australian culture and the #MeToo movement, interviewing investigative journalist Kate Mclymont and George McEnroe, broadcaster and founder of **Shebah**, Australia's first and only active all-female rideshare service for women and children – “for women driven by women”. It was 6 months since the Harvey Weinstein scandal hit Hollywood and 4 months since the revelations about predatory star gardening presenter Don Burke. Kate was the journalist who worked on that. People at Channel 9 knew what was going on, but Burke was a huge money spinner for them and they didn't want to upset that. She also pointed out how hard it was for women to come forward adding that actor Craig McLaughlan was suing one of the main women who had made accusations against him, and the influence of using a position of authority.

Sally asked: What was it about Weinstein that started the movement?

Kate thought that it was a combination of things: the star power of the women involved gave it attention and traction. And it was with the backdrop of the Trump Administration and the misogyny and sexism that was so apparent during and after the election campaign. George added that mass credibility was needed for women to come forward, and women wanted accountability. A crackdown, or even an assault, on women's rights had been foreshadowed and begun in the United States.

What I found both interesting and appalling was that both women had experienced extensive backlash, particularly through social media. George pointed out that Shebah was a response to reality and a need for safety. Only 4% of cab drivers are women and only 10% of Uber drivers are women. Yet she received death threats and a campaign against her that was vicious, scary and relentless. On the other hand, she said that support has been extraordinary and that many of her drivers, of whom there are now over 1,000, have trauma in their background. She noted that there is only a 4% conviction rate for rape so it is easier getting women to protect each other than to gain redress through the courts. What does all that say about Australian men and our society? Kate did not think that there had been a particular 'Australian' reaction to their work, except maybe in the male belief that 'women aren't good sports anymore'. She was trying to track down many on Twitter who were hiding behind anonymity to attack her with a flood of abuse, a common statement being that 'she should be raped'.

Kate thought that when non-celebrities are involved in the #MeToo movement then things will change. And a threat to sue may be effective. George emphasized that data is needed. If women are able to make contact through something like 1800RESPECT then the movement will move forward. At present there are no services in Australia to enable an anonymous complaint except through the union. A framework needs to be established to support people and give them tools to make a complaint. But obviously, it would take a brave person to come forward with allegations. Kate thought that the teaching of Respectful Relationships should go beyond Year 9 (are you listening Matthew Guy?), that education has a powerful part to play in combating harassment and predatory behavior.

Both women believed that the #MeToo movement will broaden out in many ways to include, for example, gendered pay inequality. But it obviously takes gutsy women, with support, to combat the awful sexism that exists in our culture and the violent responses to it from many men.

SYDNEY PEACE PRIZE: Australia's International Prize for Peace – the 2018 winner is Nobel Prize Winning Economist Professor Joseph Stiglitz

by Carmen Green

Sydney Peace Prize recipients are some of the world's most effective peacemakers. They champion solutions to the most urgent global challenges and inspire us to be the change we want to see. The Prize brings the community together to recognise these extraordinary achievements. It starts vital public debate and creates a platform to ensure their voices are heard. By sharing their remarkable stories of vision and courage, the Sydney Peace Prize reminds us that a peaceful, equitable and just world is possible.

See: <http://sydneypeacefoundation.org.au/sydney-peace-prize/>

This year, Professor Joseph Stiglitz will receive the Sydney Peace Prize. The Columbia University Professor & former Chief Economist at the World Bank joins past winners such as Naomi Klein (2016), Julian Burnside (2014), Professor Noam Chomsky (2011), John Pilger (2009), Arundhati Roy (2004), Mary Robinson (2002 and others. What an incredible list of inspiring individuals from around the world.

There has been widespread media coverage of Professor Stiglitz's prize. Stiglitz is quoted in an excellent article by Nick Bryant in the AGE's Good Weekend Magazine 21/4/18 as saying that: *"Australia used to be one of the most equal countries in the world. It's now below average for advanced nations. That was a result of a change in government policies. It wasn't inevitable"*.

Bryant also said that Stiglitz has praised only one Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd whose management of the Global Financial Crisis was "a text book example of what to do and the best response in the world".

Stiglitz has repeatedly criticised trickle-down economics as well as arguments in favour of cutting company taxes to increase wages. Stiglitz believes that such tax cuts continue to be advocated in both the US and Australia as evidence of an economic system that is designed to help business rather than increase the wellbeing of the majority of the people in the country.

Professor Stiglitz says that like many other places in the world, Australia has suffered stagnant wages, the crushing of trade unions and the dangers of reliance on the market economy. His message to governments is that they need to respond to his economic ideas and address these issues.

The Peace Prize jury commended Professor Stiglitz for dedicating his life's work to challenging conventional economics in the pursuit of global social justice and for speaking truth to power while proposing achievable solutions. Archie Law, Chair of the Sydney Peace Foundation, said that Professor Stiglitz has galvanised and shaped global debates on inequality and economic fairness over the last 3 decades.

Joseph Stiglitz will speak at events for the Sydney Peace Foundation in November 2018. If you want further information on Stiglitz's work borrow from your local library: "The Price of Inequality" by Joseph Stiglitz Penguin 2013

The Stella Prize

by Anne Sgro

The decision to establish a major literary prize for Australian women writers was made in 2012 in an effort to combat the gender bias that existed at a number of levels. Women were under-represented as winners of the major literary prizes, their books received fewer reviews, and there were fewer of their works on school curriculum. The founders thought that much of this bias was unconscious, but decided to do something about it.

I recently attended a Wheeler Centre conversation that celebrated the 6th year of the prize and looked at the widespread benefits that have followed from its establishment. The results have been quite astonishing. There is the value of the prize itself; the increased book sales also for many of those shortlisted; and to quote Aviva Tuffield, one of the founders: "In the past five years, four of five winners (of the Miles Franklin Literary Award) have been women as have 17 of the 25 shortlisted authors, with the first- ever all-female shortlist in 2013. Moreover this trend is evident across all major prizes. And women writers are being added to school curriculums: the VCE English curriculum now has gender parity in terms of authors listed as opposed to 68.5 percent of the books being by men back in 2014" (Age 12.4.18). As Emily Bitto stated, it shows young aspiring women writers that there is a future.

Toni Jordan hosted the panel.

2015 winner **Emily Bitto: The Strays** – a novel written from an outsiders point of view. I haven't read it yet.

2014 winner **Clare Wright: The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka**. One of the books I had to buy. Historian Clare Wright said that women had been central to all the events leading to the Eureka Stockade – they organised, they wrote to the newspapers, wrote petitions, were present in the Stockade itself. But they were totally left out of the narrative, and although they made several attempts to write themselves back in, for example at the time of the 50th anniversary in 1904, they were not successful. They were outsiders, if you like.

2018 winner **Alexis Wright: Tracker**, which she described as a collective memoir, a community biography of an outstanding Aboriginal man who was also her friend. I will get it from the library. Alexis Wright, a member of the Waanje nation of the Gulf of Carpentaria, spoke of Tracker, a member of the Stolen Generation from Central Australia who was sent as a child, with others, to Crocker Island to separate him from his people; he was a great strategic thinker and an important man. I hadn't realized what efforts were made in removing children from their lands - in contrast, children from the Top End were sent to Central Australia.

Clare Wright was the most 'political' of the panel members. She can't actually see a time when we won't need to have a Stella Prize, but believes that it has become a movement now, not just a prize. It has given the Australian literary landscape enormous energy and has had positive flow-on effects. The work done in schools is about changing the curriculum, changing the perception of who is an important writer and a lot is being done behind the scenes. Positive discrimination is needed in our society.

Clare is turning 'Eureka' into a trilogy: her next book, due out in October, set 1901 – 1911, will examine the right to be counted, the right to have a say, looking at the suffrage movement here and Australian influence in Britain. She reminded us that Australia was regarded as a progressive, democratic story in this period. I might have to buy that book too. Her third will look at petitions of indigenous women seeking the right to be heard and counted and will maybe refer to the work that Patricia Grimshaw mentioned at her IWD address.

REPLY TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE ON AGEING

UAW member Yvonne Adami is a published poet. She recently dashed off the following poem, as a response to examples of ageism that she encounters in the community.

Reply to the questionnaire on ageing

I took a walk

I did not lose my way

Drank coffee

I did not spill it

Went to a lecture on first nation people

Visited the art gallery

Spoke to friends

Remembered their names

Used the ATM

Shopped at the market

Ignored the boy who called me

Young lady

And darling

Found my car in the car park

Bought wine

Collected poetry at the library

I did not fall over

© Yvonne Adami

A SHOUT-OUT FOR UAW MEMBER NANCYE SMITH

By Anne Sgro

Nancye Smith has been a UAW member since the organisation's beginning in 1950. She participated in the first meeting with her mother, Edith Taylor. She comes from a line of feminist activists who campaigned for the vote, peace and social justice. Her grandmother and her mother, then a child of about 12, took part in the Great Suffragette Demonstration in London in 1908. They were part of the thousands of women who marched through London and stood listening to sixteen speakers in Hyde Park. Nancye has in her possession a wonderful (now framed) paper serviette commemorating the event, with photographs of those 16 women. Her grandmother was arrested with other participants and held overnight in a cold, clammy cell – to be freed in the morning, the attempt at intimidation over. (There is a photo of the napkin in Yvonne Smith's 'Taking Time P57). It's fabulous. So how could Nancye not have become an activist for women, peace and social justice herself?

As well as being a UAW member, she was an activist in her own area - in the Moonee Valley Peace Network; as a campaigner for the establishment of the Essendon Community Hospital; she campaigned for decent conditions in nursing homes which included contacting MPs, making visits, lobbying on behalf of residents, writing articles; and she took part in the UAW campaign warning of the dangers of hair dyes. As a young woman she was a well qualified senior nurse in charge of a ward but was forced to resign when she married. Marriage was a step too far for nursing – not only discrimination but a scandalous waste of talent. Nancye spoke at the UAW's 60th anniversary about how devastated she was to be forced from a job that she loved and was good at. Her sister, South Australian member Irene Gale, says that "she followed the example her mother Edith had set, and they worked together through the years to achieve a decent life for all people.

Nancye has just celebrated her 92nd birthday and, although finding it harder to get about, still supports UAW events when she is able.

Australian Living Peace Museum.

Having invited activist, and now UAW member, Fran Newell to speak at our February Organising Committee meeting, we have followed up by joining the Australian Living Peace Museum, making a small donation, and agreeing to co-operate/collaborate where possible in, for example, writing submissions seeking funds, in joint action, etc. With the increasing militarization of our history and an almost re-writing of past WW1 battles, we need to emphasis peace now more than ever. www.livingpeacemuseum.org.au

What is really happening in Syria?

A few days after the US, UK and France had bombed Syria on the grounds that the Syrian government had used chemical weapons in Douma, renowned and respected British journalist Robert Fisk, who has been reporting on the Middle East for at least 3 decades, and was the first western correspondent to arrive in the battered city, interviewed a doctor at the clinic where the victims were treated. The doctor said that no chemical attack occurred, rather it was footage that showed civilians who had inhaled dust, not chemicals, after a Syrian bombing attack. Who or what to believe in the war of propaganda and self interest? Check out the IPAN website for an interesting read. The Independent and Peaceful Australia Network, a network of organisations around Australia – community, faith, peace, unions, individuals who are aiming for a truly independent foreign policy for Australia, and peace.

WOMEN AND POWER: MARY BEARD

Review by Anne Sgro

Mary Beard is Professor of Classics at Cambridge University. Her book is a little gem that I picked up from the library. It shows how powerful women have been treated, with examples ranging from the classical world to the present. She considers the public voice of women, our cultural assumptions, and how few women resist being packaged into a male template. There are illustrations from the classics to the modern: Hilary Clinton as Medusa with Trump as Perseus triumphantly holding aloft her severed head; the cartoon of the sole woman at a board meeting having her point taken seriously only when repeated by a man.

In the classics, women could legitimately speak up if they were defending their children, their husbands or the interests of other women. But like Penelope, who was ordered by her son to shut up and go upstairs, their views were not welcomed on other matters.

Women's voices have been depicted as strident, shrill, whining. Too many of those who do speak out receive appalling online abuse. Beard asks, "What are the cultural underpinnings of misogyny in politics or the workplace and its forms... How and why do the conventional definitions of 'power' (or for that matter 'knowledge', 'expertise' and 'authority') that we carry around in our heads exclude women?" She notes the shared metaphors that we use of female access to power – 'knocking on the door', 'storming the citadel' and 'smashing the glass ceiling'.

Athenian drama has offered unforgettable women – Medea, Antigone, Clytemnestra (who refused to give up power when her husband returned from the wars) - but they are definitely not presented as role models.

"You cannot easily fit women into a structure that is already coded as male; you have to change the structure. That means thinking about power differently... It means, above all, thinking about power as an attribute or even a verb ('to power') not as a possession...the ability to be effective, to make a difference in the world, and the right to be taken seriously, together as much as individually."

When she looks at the representation of women in Parliament Beard exercises a note of caution. Women in Rwanda are over 60% of the legislature; the Saudi Arabian National Council has a higher proportion of women than the US Congress. She surmises that, perhaps in some places, the presence of large numbers of women in parliament means that parliament is where the power is NOT.

Borrow the book from the library. It is a good read.

And while I am writing about books, it is worthwhile reading the latest Quarterly Essay: **MOMENT OF TRUTH. History and Australia's future** by historian Mark McKenna, Professor of History at the University of Sydney. It starts with the Uluru Statement from the Heart, examines PM Turnbull's response to it, and traces the struggles of Indigenous peoples to have a voice and have their 65,000 years of existence recognized. He quotes the late Inga Glendinnen: "There remains a scar on the face of the country, a birthstain of injustice and exclusion directed against the people who could so easily provide the core of the sense of ourselves as a nation, but who remain on the fringes of the land they once possessed."

Actually, I think that I will have to buy this one.

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Victoria