

SWAN newsletter

Southern Women's Action Network Inc.
Reg No A0038144Z, ABN 84 41627 1331
PO Box 392 Mt Martha 3934

Volume 3 Issue 1

February 2003

'UNLIKELY RADICAL' TO ADDRESS SWAN

In this issue

- Strip searching review group.
- Details March meeting — back page.
- 'Unlikely radical' to address SWAN.
- SWANers active in peace rallies.
- Mohsen Sol-tanyzand the prisoner poet.

Speakers this year include
Sharan Burrow, president
ACTU
Prue Holstein, /Exec Director
Asia Society

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE

The Admin Committee met during January to plan the year's activities.

Facilitator
Carole Ford

Secretary
Maureen McPhate

Treasurer
Val McKenna

Committee Members
Alleyne Lacy
Nola Plackett
Debbie Roberts

Under the title of 'The Unlikely Radicals' the *Weekend Australian Magazine* (Nov 23 2002) ran a story about the lives of Kate Durham and her husband Julian Burnside, QC. Kate Durham will speak at the first SWAN meeting for 2003 on Sunday **23 March**.

Kate Durham is recognised as the driving force behind the establishment of Spare Rooms for Refugees network, which encourages people to invite refugees into their homes and is responsible for a campaign urging people to write to refugees. Through these letters, the depth of misery and cruelty in Australian detention centres is exposed.

Kate Durham says of herself

that '[she] was always a stirrer'. At 15 she handed out Labor how-to-vote cards in a deeply conservative electorate. She led a student strike at Toorak College, Mt Eliza and was subsequently expelled over her 'general lack of co-operation'. She finished her education at local state secondary colleges, eventually studying fine arts, painting and sculpture. She is also a jeweller who has exhibited in London, Paris and New York.

Durham has her own Web site devoted to the refugee issue and features extracts from her book of drawings *Trust, Lust, Chaos and Cruelty*, showing elfin-faced men and women 'confronting each

other on life's metaphorical couch' (*Weekend Australian Magazine*).

Kate Durham produced a documentary on the refugee issue for TV which, although shown at various venues in the wider community, was refused time on the ABC.

Both Kate Durham and her husband Julian Burnside talk about the 'great shame' of Australia's refugee policy.

SWAN welcomes the charismatic and committed activist KATE DURHAM to the Mornington Peninsula! Don't miss the opportunity to listen to, and speak with, this vital woman!

SUNDAY 23 MARCH

SWANers ACTIVE IN PEACE RALLIES

Many SWANers have actively engaged in peace rallies and protests against war with Iraq.

SWAN was well-represented at the meeting outside Greg Hunt's office in Hastings and in the march through the

town that followed.

SWAN was similarly well-represented at the public protest held on the previous Thursday evening at the Mornington Information centre where some 250 community members gathered to

voice their anti-war sentiments.

A number of our members also travelled to Melbourne to participate in the largest protest demonstration ever seen in Melbourne. SWAN in ACTION!

STRIP SEARCHING REVIEW GROUP

**NOT TOO LATE
TO JOIN
STRIP SEARCHING
REVIEW GROUP**

Twenty SWANers have registered expressions of interest in becoming involved in a review of strip searching in Victoria.

The first meeting is planned for April. A suitable meeting day and venue will be decided at the March meeting of SWAN.

A plan/time frame has been developed and it is hoped that, by working in sub-groups, an initial review will be completed by the end of the year.

Research material appears hard to come by, making the need for a collection of relevant material all the more necessary.

If you haven't added your name to the list and feel you would like to be involved, please add your name to the list on Sunday 16 March.

As we aim for a balanced report, we need to present arguments for retaining strip searching. So, if you feel there is a place for this procedure in Vic-

torian correctional institutions, please take the opportunity to put your views by contributing to the strip searching review group's activities.

This will be the third report undertaken by SWAN. The Social Audit and STW document produced by SWAN members set a high standard — we don't intend to rest on our laurels!

All assistance and/or support will be appreciated!

*Experience as a
councillor in local
government is a good
preparation for life in
state politics
according to
Government Whip
Glennys Romanes*

GOVERNMENT WHIP IN QUESTION TIME!

Glennys Romanes, Government Whip, willingly responded to numerous questions asked by her SWAN audience at the November meeting last year.

Glennys told of her work with Community Aid Abroad and referred particularly to the six years she shared an Administrative position with her husband

Graham.

Glennys' work as a Councillor for Brunswick (Moreland Shire) provided rich experience for her later role as a politician. The position of Government Whip in the Bracks Government had given her a sense of personal strength, Glennys said.

A major duty of the Govern-

ment Whip is to ensure that all paper work is correctly presented at all times.

Glennys Romanes also said that current opinion is that the Upper House should have more power, and proportional representation on Party lines.

By Gwen Wilson.

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS TO HEATHER OSLAND

Christmas has faded into the past again! We are pleased to report, however, that Heather Osland was overjoyed to receive gifts and cards from SWAN members and their friends.

Val McKenna visited Heather just before Christmas and she

took with her a box of gifts and cards from a number of SWANers.

Val's visits and SWAN's continued interest, we believe, is a form of positive and continuing support for Heather during her continued incarceration.

Heather wrote a letter of thanks to Val for the gifts and for the friendship she experiences through her connection with SWAN.

Thanks to all those who contributed and to Val for acting as a messenger of goodwill!

**SWAN
continues
to
support
Heather Osland**

Mohsen Soltanyzand and poetry

Mohsen Soltanyzand was the name chosen by Val McKenna from a list of refugees in Australia's detention centres as part of the letter writing campaign organised by Julian Burnside (mentioned on page 1). This same Mohsen Soltanyzand has been in the news! Recently released from Villawood Detention Centre (NSW), Soltanyzand suffers from what medical and psychiatric reports refer to as 'post-traumatic stress disorder.' His initial trauma was

in Iran but is believed to have been reinforced by his experiences in Australia's detention centres.

Soltanyzand had a lot of time to think during the four years spent in detention centres! His thinking revolved around words: poetry! The poems reveal the suffering of this thirty-two year-old's life.

The time of Soltanyzand's release from incarceration coincided with the release of his

first CD where some of the poems are set to music. Geoffrey Datson, who wrote the music for the CD, on Stickylabel, said 'I have listened to his heart and can find no hatred there, although his life currently holds little promise. I am inspired by his positivism and humor in spite of his interminable incarceration.' Soltanyzand's poem *If One Person Dies* was read at rallies on World Refugee Day in June last year. **Printed below is a poem from the CD.**

**All proceeds
from the sale of
Soltanyzand's CD
will go to
Chilout
(Children Out of
Detention)**

Mother

There is coffin on my shoulder
Where is graveyard?
Show me the way to the graveyard
I only need to carry this coffin
Must bury this coffin
I must pick the soil with the tip of the finger of sentiment
I must understand my love with all my feelings
There are your memories in this coffin
I want to bury it
I have already dug the hole of grave
I have found the depth of the hole in my feelings
I will put this coffin in this hole
Will pour tonnes of soil on the coffin
The coffin is resting quietly under the ground
Pity on me
Don't know why I am so restless
What should I do with my heart?
I was able to bury the coffin of your memories at the grave
But the ghost of your memories is hiding all my body like chains
What to do? Or what can I do?
The only way out is to kill your memories from thoughts
My heart should be erased of your mark on it,
Should be erased
How can I do it?
Because now
All my heart belongs to you.

Mohsen Soltanyzand.

*'Some of
Mohsen
Soltanyzand's
poetry grabs life
by the throat.'*

**For information about
this CD see
www.stickylabel.com.au**

SOUTHERN WOMEN'S ACTION NETWORK

NEXT MEETING SUNDAY

Room 18
Mt Martha House
Cnr Dominion Road and the Esplanade
Mt Martha
9.30am

Tell your
friends
about SWAN



DON'T MISS THIS OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR

KATE DURHAM

- Artist/jeweller
- Political activist
- Published work: *Book of drawings: Trust, Lust, Chaos and Cruelty*
- Passionate campaigner for the rights of refugees
- Driving force behind Spare Rooms for Refugees network.

TOPIC: AUSTRALIA AND THE REFUGEE ISSUE

SUNDAY 23 MARCH at 9.30am

Cost: \$7.00

Tell your
friends
about SWAN



RSVP
Maureen McPhate
5974 4096
Val McKenna
5974 3461
by 13 March

SWAN newsletter

Volume 3 Issue 2

April 2003

In this issue

- Strip searching review group meets.
- Details May meeting.
- Gwen Wilson's report.
- STW 2003 CATCH Series
- SWAN organises public meeting.

Speakers this year include
Sharan Burrow, president
ACTU
Prue Holstein, Exec Director
Asia Society

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE

The Admin Committee met during April to plan May meetings .

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INAAM BARAKAT – MAY SPEAKER

Inaam Barakat is a Lebanese Muslim who, for the past ten years, has managed the Overseas Qualifications Unit in the Employment Programs Division, Department for Victorian Communities.

In this position Inaam has initiated numerous programs and activities for overseas qualified professionals.

Inaam and the Overseas Qualifications Unit which she manages were awarded Victoria's Award for Excellence in Multicultural Community Employment in 2002.

In her previous position, Inaam spent a numbers of years working for, and eventually managing, Victorian Government Employment

Programs focusing on providing employment placements for unemployed migrants.

Inaam Barakat is an active member of various multicultural governmental advisory committees and currently is Chairperson of the North Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre.

Another interesting aspect of Inaam's career has been her long association with SBS radio, having produced and presented her own program for twenty years, mainly focusing on women's issues. She is also a founding member of various ethnic organisations, including the Australian Arabic Council and the Victorian Arabic Social Ser-

vices. Born in Lebanon, Inaam spent much of her childhood in Middle Eastern countries where she experienced living in cosmopolitan societies.

Inaam migrated to Australia with her parents, brothers and sisters in 1974 eventually settling in Armadale, Victoria.

SUNDAY 18 MAY

hear
INAAM BARAKAT
9.30am

MT MARTHA HOUSE
cnr Dominion Road
and The Esplanade

MT MARTHA

SWANers ORGANISE PUBLIC FORUM

Under SWAN's auspices a public meeting featuring guest speaker Surma Hamid was held at Mornington on 2 May. Surma has appeared on TV and radio in discussions relating to the war in Iraq. Under the title of 'An Iraqi women speaks out: war is not

the answer!' Surma declared that the recent war 'had plunged [her] country into darkness — back to the middle ages.' 'Civil war,' Surma said, 'was now inevitable'. In thanking Surma, Judith Coucaud-Grayley, founding member of SWAN, and obvi-

ously moved by Surma's address, voiced the hope that light will eventually dispel the darkness Surma described. A cheque for \$300 was presented to Surma towards the work of the Committee for Defence of Iraqi Women's Rights.

STRIP SEARCHING REVIEW GROUP MEETS

**NEXT MEETING
SATURDAY
14 JUNE
at
Val McKenna's home
6 Cornwall Crescent
MT MARTHA
at
2.30pm
5974 3461**

SWAN sub-committee for research into strip searching in Victoria met for the first time on April 5.

After discussing aspects of concern about the use of strip searching in Victoria, an agreement was reached to produce a resource document setting out all available information about the procedure of strip searching in Victoria, including a list of recommendations supporting the banning of the procedure.

Bringing together available information on strip searching procedures in Victoria would provide an invaluable resource document for future studies of, or research into, what many people perceive to be an unacceptable legal procedure in many of Victoria's correctional institutions.

Those attending the meeting undertook responsibility for researching information for particular sections of the docu-

ment.

Anyone interested in participating in the work of this sub-committee is invited to attend the next meeting on Saturday June 14 at the home of Val McKenna, 6 Cornwall Crescent, Mt Martha.

If you would like further information contact Carole Ford at 5987 2467 or Debbie Roberts at 9787 6840. Your contribution would be greatly appreciated!

NEWSLETTER: The mailing list is being updated! If you no longer attend SWAN meetings, but would still like to receive the newsletter, please forward \$7.00 to: **SWAN Secretary, PO Box 392 Mt Martha 3934.**

*Kate Durham left us
with the feeling that
she, herself, is in a
state of grief and
turmoil over the
suffering of human
beings who seek only
a better life.*

(Gwen Wilson)

DURHAM AND BURNSIDE DRAW BIG AUDIENCE!

In an emotionally taxing address Kate Durham told over 85 SWANers of her visit to Nauru where she witnessed first hand the appalling conditions experienced by refugees. Detainees have now spent two Christmases in the harsh conditions of this inhospitable country — all food and other items have to be flown in from Bris-

bane.

Kate continues to receive mail from detainees on Nauru which she finds emotionally disturbing — she wonders how these desperate people can be seen as a threat to our country.

Julian Burnside added that the detainees are held unlawfully under Nauru's constitution and

that therefore, Australia is transgressing this same constitution. In responding to a question, Burnside postulated that Australia could successfully take 40,000 of the world's displaced people annually. Both speakers commented on federal government deception in relation to the refugee issue.

By Gwen Wilson

PROFESSOR GRIMSHAW FOR 2003 CATCH SERIES

All those who participated in, and enjoyed, the series Conversations at the Court House last year will be pleased to hear that another Spring series is planned for this year.

Professor Patricia Grimshaw, University of Melbourne, will speak on Friday October 10.

Professor Grimshaw recently debated historian Keith Windshuttle before a packed Melbourne audience on the topic: White settlement: Violent Conquest or Benign Colonisation? The debate stemmed from Windshuttle's latest publication — *The Fabrication of Aborigi-*

nal History. Professor Grimshaw's latest publication is *Letters from Aboriginal Women of Victoria 1867-1926*.

Further information about both these historians and the heated debate about interpretations of Australia's settlement history can be found on Radio National internet site.

**WATCH OUT
for
2003
CATCH SERIES
(Conversations
at the
Court House)**

SPACE FOR OTHER VIEWS

SWAN newsletter content reflects the views of the Administrative Committee.

Actions, responses, and views are developed through wide and detailed discussions during Administrative Committee meetings. Although the Committee attempts to genuinely reflect the general feelings of meetings and members, there is an awareness that not all members will agree with all decisions all the time!

If any member or reader desires

to put an alternative view or to challenge views printed in the SWAN newsletter they are cordially invited to submit such views in writing. Letters can be addressed to the SWAN address on the front of this publication. Or, they can be emailed to: caford@poc.com.au

SWAN remains committed to its goals of promoting social justice and empowering women to become involved in community decision-making processes.

An opportunity to listen to, and speak with, a range of successful and well-qualified women helps other women to be more informed and to develop confidence in expressing their views in public.

SWAN aims to provide a safe and supportive environment in which women feel encouraged to express their individual viewpoints.

SWAN Admin. Committee

All proceeds from the Mornington Public meeting were donated to Committee in Defence of Iraqi Women's Rights

Woman of the Future, written by Eugenie

I am a child
I can't predict the future
But I can tell my past.
I live to tell my story
Of hopes and dreams and fear.

I am all I can see.
The changing ways of culture
The scariness that lies ahead.
Déjà vu from yesterday
Suddenly becomes clearer.

I am all I hear,
Gunshots, cries and screams.
The harsh comments that I hear.
People with bad news to tell
The sounds of pins dropping in test conditions.

I am all I've been taught.
'Don't talk to strangers',
'You are an individual',
Things that don't mean a thing.

I am all I can feel.
The curly fur on my dog's back,
Sand sticking to my feet.
Blood trying to seep out of an open wound
Wet paint on a freshly painted seat.

I am a muffin waiting to come out of the oven.
I am a child!

*SWAN member
Susanne Reid shared
this poem with us.*

*It was written
by
Eugenie*

**Mail newsletter contributions to
PO Box 392
Mt Martha 3934**

SOUTHERN WOMEN'S ACTION NETWORK

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18 MAY
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Cnr Dominion Road and the Esplanade
Mt Martha
9.30am

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DON'T MISS THIS OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR

INAAM BARAKAT

- **Manager Overseas Qualifications Unit, Dept. for Victorian Communities.**
- **Current chairperson North Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre.**
- **Presented her own program on SBS Radio for twenty years.**

TOPIC: Victorian Multicultural Communities

SUNDAY 18 MAY at 9.30am

Cost: \$7.00

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RSVP
Maureen McPhate
5974 4096
Vai McKenna
5974 3461
by 15 MAY

SWAN newsletter

Volume 3 Issue 3

June 2003

In this issue

- Strip searching review group meeting.
- Details July meeting.
- Gwen Wilson's report.
- Inspiration for Tanberg!
- Carole on the airwaves!

SEPTEMBER SPEAKER

SUE HOLSTEIN
Executive Director
Asia Society
SUNDAY 21 SEPTEMBER

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE

The Admin Committee met 14 June to plan July meeting.

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ACTU PRESIDENT TO SPEAK TO SWAN

SWANers will be delighted to hear that Sharan Burrow, president Australian Council of Trade Unions, accepted our invitation as July guest speaker.

Elected to the position of President in May 2000, Sharan became only the second woman to be elected to that position.

2000 was auspicious for Sharan because in October of that year she also became the first woman to be elected President of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions Asia Pacific Region Organisation.

Sharan Burrow's background prepared her well for her present career. Born in 1954 in

Warren, a small town in western NSW, her family already had a long history of involvement in unions and the struggle to improve the lives of working people: Sharan's great, great grandfather participated in the shearers' strike of the 1890s and later became one of the first organisers for the Australian Workers' Union, standing for the state seat of Cobar for the fledgling Australian Labor Party in 1896.

In 1976 Sharan began her teacher training, later teaching in schools around country NSW. During this period she became an organiser for the NSW Teachers' Federation, based in Bathurst where, eventually she became Presi-

dent of the Bathurst Trades and Labour Council during the 1980s. The 1990s saw Sharan elected Senior Vice-president of the NSW Teachers' Federation, becoming President of Australian Education Union in 1992. Sharan also represented the AEU on the ACTU Executive throughout the 1990s. A woman of great achievement!

SUNDAY 20 JULY
hear
ACTU PRESIDENT
SHARAN BURROW
9.30am
MT MARTHA HOUSE
cnr Dominion Road
and the Esplanade
MT MARTHA

CAROLE FORD on FREEWAVES

SWAN facilitator, Carole Ford, can be heard on local community radio 3RPP on the 4th Thursday each month at 3pm when she conducts the women's program 'Freewaves'.

Recently, Carole interviewed

Ruth Richardson, mother of Pauline who died in custody. Pauline's case was highly profiled in the media and, since that time, Ruth has been active in trying to reform aspects of the correctional system.

In her forthcoming program Carole will interview Pauline Burgess (who also spoke at the May SWAN meeting). Pauline Burgess works with the Trade Union movement.

FREEWAVES — 3RPP
Carole Ford, 3pm
4th Thursday each month

STRIP SEARCHING REVIEW GROUP MEETING

**NEXT MEETING
SS GROUP
SATURDAY
30 AUGUST
at
Alleyene's home
3/6 Nelson St
MORNINGTON
at
2.30pm
5975 4210**

SWAN sub-committee for research into strip searching in Victoria met on 14 June at the home of Val McKenna.

Participants shared the results of their research over the two months since the inaugural meeting of the group in April.

The committee has been granted permission for representatives to visit the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre at Deer Park (women's prison) to inspect and inquire about features

of the prison relevant to the committee's research into strip searching.

Already, a preliminary draft document setting out structure and possible chapters has been developed. The outcome document aims to gather together as much information about the procedure of strip searching as possible. Presently, information is difficult to come by and requires widescale research and inquiry. Hopefully the docu-

ment will be used as a basis for further research or as convincing evidence for the banning of strip searching in Victoria.

Within the next few months the committee plans to develop strategies to publicise its work in the media in order to stimulate public debate over the issue of the banning of strip searching in Victoria. As a start, Ruth Richardson recently spoke on Carole Ford's program on local community station 3RPP.

NEWSLETTER: The mailing list is being updated! If you no longer attend SWAN meetings, but would still like to receive the newsletter, please forward \$7.00 to: **SWAN Secretary, PO Box 392 Mt Martha 3934.**

*Inaam and her
colleagues in the
employment division of
the Overseas
Qualifications Unit
have placed over 3000
people every year in
the past decade.
(Gwen Wilson)*

SWANers appreciate INAAM BARATAK

Members warmed to gifted Inaam Baratak, speaker at the May meeting. With her parents and siblings, Inaam arrived in Melbourne in 1974, settling at Armadale.

Inaam said that multiculturalism in Victoria is considered a worthy model. The 2001 Census shows Victoria had migrants

from 208 out of the 275 countries in the world. Climate, political stability and safety are major factors in the choice of Melbourne as a place to start a new life.

Inaam made the point that many migrant professional people such as lawyers and doctors experience great difficulty hav-

ing their qualifications accepted and, in many cases, had to undertake years of retraining. Nevertheless, she and her colleagues have been able to assist migrants find positions in the fields of engineering, medicine, teaching, art, law and information technology. Migrants are under great pressure from families to succeed. (Gwen Wilson)

SWAN SUPPORT

A donation of \$100 has been forwarded to Community Radio (3CR). This station is community focused, supporting community activism. The station relies entirely on public contributions to stay on air.

A book commemorating Lyndsay Steele's contribution and commitment to SWAN and community affairs over many years has now been placed in the Rosebud Library.

A cheque for \$120 was for-

warded to the Hotham Mission in support of a mother and her two children whose dire situation was brought to SWAN's attention at the May meeting by Pauline Burgess.

SWAN itself is looking for funding for the Strip Searching document — any ideas?

**3RPP
Carole Ford
4th Thursday
each month
at 3pm
women's program**

COMING TO TERMS WITH OUR PAST

It is a tragedy for Australian national culture that we have not yet been able to come to terms with our past. The proof of this is in the continued debate over what has become known as the 'stolen generations'. It is now six years since the HREOC report exposed the details of 200 years of gross human rights violations perpetrated against Indigenous Australians and the degree to which governments and social institutions were responsible.

Despite the testimony of 777 witnesses, Prime Minister Howard denied there had ever been a 'stolen generation'. His refusal to apologise caused division and heated debate within the community and Australia exposed its darker side as a culture which was at core immature, racist and fearful.

In the last decade the Wik and Mabo decisions followed by the HREOC report represented opportunities to acknowledge

the past, make reparation at last and effect true reconciliation.

As a nation we lacked the ability to embrace these opportunities and bring closer our shared history, but the issue of reconciliation and the 'stolen generations' will have to be faced eventually...When white Australia recognises its past, true reconciliation can be an exciting new phase in our shared history.

Karen Barker

At left is an extract from an essay written by Karen Barker as part of the Year 12 subject Contemporary Australian Society. We thought we'd share it with you in light of the CATCH series later this year at which Professor Patricia Grimshaw will speak about Australian History and Indigenous culture.

And another thing...(with thanks to the Age)

Most regular readers of the *Age* are probably fans of cartoonist, Ron Tanberg. But how many of us know that Tanberg is a fan of Val McKenna, SWAN founding member and present treasurer? Val recently received a letter from Ron Tanberg saying that she and husband Gerry 'are obviously good at writing relevant letters since I seem to have picked them out to draw on!' We agree with Ron Tanberg and, in case you've missed out on some of Val's 'gems', we provide the following samples:



Sorry folks, we're having some SCAN problems! Unable to provide accompanying letter for the cartoon opposite, but here's what Val had to say in relation to the cartoon below left:

Why didn't Howard mention Saddam's human rights and torture atrocities when he turned the boat people away? Did anyone suggest it was to win an election?

Val McKenna

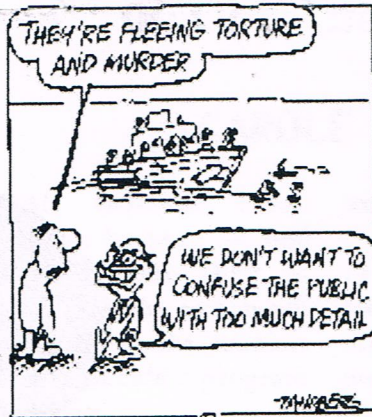
Val's letters to the *Age* prove popular with political cartoonist Ron Tanberg!

And another thing

AGE 24-5-03



The Germans claimed they "didn't know" about their concentration camps, but Australians don't have that excuse. How long before the ABC's budget is cut more savagely after the shocking revelations on *Four Corners*?
Val McKenna, Mount Martha



A mighty effort, Val! We look forward to more great letters and Tanberg cartoons in the future!

Mail newsletter contributions to
PO Box 392
Mt Martha 3934
or email
debronrob@bigpond.com

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DON'T MISS THIS OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR

SHARAN BURROW

- **President Australian Council of Trade Unions.**
- **Only the second woman to be elected ACTU president.**
- **First woman elected President of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions Asia Pacific Region Organisation.**
- **Former secondary school teacher.**
- **President of Australian Education Union 1992.**

TOPIC: The changing nature of work and the consequences for family and health

SUNDAY 20 JULY at 9.30am

Cost: \$7.00

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**RSVP
Maureen McPhate
5974 4096
Val McKenna
5974 3461
by 17 JULY**

SWAN newsletter

Volume 3 Issue 4

August 2003

Special points of interest:

- Annual General Meeting details.
- Distinguished speaker for November meeting.
- The Karen people of Burma.
- Gwen Wilson report.

NOVEMBER MEETING DUR'E DARA, OAM

- Restaurateur
- Business woman
- Musician
- Indian by race, Malaysian by birth, Australian by choice!
- Convener Victorian Women's Trust
- President Restaurant & Catering Association of Vic.
- Vice President Philanthropy Australia.

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Jo Diplock

Nola Plackett, D.Roberts

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GROUP FROM AKYP SEPTEMBER GUEST SPEAKERS

What is the AKYP?

The Australia Karen Youth Project is a Melbourne-based group of young people who came together in 1999 for a visit to the Thai-Burma border for cultural exchange with young Karen refugees. The visit aimed to encourage the Karen and gain understanding of their complex issues.

Since that time, the AKYP has raised awareness of the Karen people's situation in relation to Burma; supports young Karen people in Melbourne as well as their friends and families still in the refugee camps inside Burma; continues to raise money to fund support programs.

Who are the Karen?

The Karen (pronounced *Karen*) make up the largest minority ethnic group in Burma, estimated at 8 million. The Burmese government is a military dictatorship resolved to repress any form of self determination by minority ethnic groups

For some 50 years, the Karen have fought to assert their rights. Refugee camps, just over the Thai border, were established 17 years ago when families fled for their lives as the Burmese army moved through their homeland, razing villages, shooting and torturing villagers and co-opting them into forced labor. Presently some 90,000 Karen refugees are housed in these

camps.

Many young Karen have grown up in the refugee camps, unable to return to their country or move elsewhere, as they are not recognised as refugees in Thailand, but are considered illegal immigrants!

Thousands more Karen live a precarious existence as displaced persons in the forests inside Burma, unable to settle anywhere for fear of the Burmese. These people are vulnerable to starvation, disease and attack.

The UN states Burma's human rights record is the worst of all nations.

(Source: AKYP Newsletter/web site www.akyp.org.au)

Next meeting: SUNDAY 21 SEPTEMBER. See page 4 for details

Annual General Meeting – 21 September

SWAN's Annual General Meeting is not a lengthy affair, taking only about 15 minutes.

Nominations have been received for all administrative committee positions. The SWAN Constitution, how-

ever, allows for an increased number of committee members should any SWAN member wish to nominate.

Necessary forms for nomination will be available on the day of the meeting.

The Constitution also allows

for 'non-core committee members'. That is, members can nominate for short-term participation on the Admin. Committee — for a period of six months, for example.

**COMMITTEE NOMINATION FORMS
AVAILABLE AT ENTRY TABLE
SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 21**

SHARAN BURROW – inspiring speaker!

*In 2003 in
Australia, we are
still talking about
equality of wages for
men and women!*

On Sunday 20 July, Sharan Burrow, ACTU president gave an inspired and inspiring address to over 70 SWAN members.

Articulate, insightful and without notes, Sharan provided an overview of the global situation in the workplace as well as an update on work issues in Australia.

In relation to paid maternity leave, Sharan said that Australia still has a long way to go, but praised the work of Prue

Goward in this area. In other countries such as the UK and certain Asian nations maternity leave arrangements were much more advanced.

Of particular interest was Sharan's recent visit to Camp 5 on the Burma/Thailand border where the regime is not democratic. She said 'forced labor is very bad and people are forced off their land to feed the army.'

In Russia, Sharan claimed, the situation for workers is very

bleak.

In talking about the 'changing nature of work in Australia' Sharan commented that less than 50% of the workforce works 9-5 while only 1/3 work a full week. Approximately 1/3 of the workforce is casual, of whom the majority are women. In relation to pay equity, Sharan said that women's wages still remain approximately 12% lower than men's wages.

Gwen Wilson.

**NEXT MEETING
SS GROUP
SATURDAY
30 AUGUST
at
Alleyene's home
3/6 Nelson St
MORNINGTON
at
2.30pm
5975 4210**

SS Committee negotiating terms of visit to women's prison

In a letter confirming SWAN representatives visit to the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, the General Manager, Brendan Money, said that he did not 'wish to make the issue of strip searching the focus of [our] visit'. Nevertheless, Mr Money is prepared to discuss 'the issue' with us.

Mr Money's decision is based on the fact that 'this matter' has been the subject of much review and 'stakeholder input' over the last 2 years, and 'all of those outcomes are now being worked through'.

The SS Committee will develop a response to Mr Money's letter and negotiate appropriate visit

conditions acceptable to both parties.

In researching SS on the internet, Jo Diplock visited the web site JusticeAction Australia. Their policy re strip searching states that strip searching and involuntary urine testing is sexual assault and therefore must be abolished. (www.justiceaction.org.au)

*The letter put a cloud
over my day!*

Val McKenna continues to write to, and receive letters from, asylum seekers in detention.

Recently Val received a letter from a very depressed young asylum seeker that 'put a cloud over [her] day'. If you would like to contact a refugee in de-

tention get in touch with the 'Australia for a Just Refugee Program' on the internet — just type in the title.

If you are interested to read in more detail about the *Tampa* issue and the asylum seeker issue in general, you might like to read the book, *Dark Victory* by

David Marr and Marian Wilkinson. As the 'blurb' says, 'this is a thrilling and provocative account of events that shattered many of the myths Australia has about itself and changed profoundly the way it is seen in the eyes of the world.'

Well worth reading!

Unity in diversity – AKYP newsletter editorial

In Burma, ethnic conflict has a history pre-dating British colonialism. However, the formation of the centralised nation state created the power structure whereby political influence was granted to the Burman elite with the other ethnic groups of Burma effectively marginalised.

Historically, divide and rule has been a central tool in the creation and maintenance of dictatorship. Throughout colonial times, Britain is perhaps most renowned for its application of this strategy, the repercussions of which can still be seen today. Former colonies such as Sri Lanka, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Burma and India/Pakistan/Bangladesh remain dislocated by religious/ethnic conflict stirred up by British rule.

The post-independence era saw a popular expectation of a form of national democracy, a removal of the colonial bonds. However, governments of independence generally lacked the will or capacity to undo the colonial structures of division. Over time the value of a divided society became increasingly evident to the interests of ruling elites, whether military or capitalist civilian bureaucracies.

In Burma, ethnic conflict has a history pre-dating British colonialism. However, the formation of the centralised nation state created the power structure whereby political influence was granted to the Burman elite

with the other ethnic groups of Burma effectively marginalised. The relative influence of the boundaries of the nation state effectively trapped the other ethnic societies inside the national boundaries and outside the central administration. Indonesia's infamous national ideology of Pancasila includes the premise of a unity in diversity, indicating a notional recognition of the necessity of an ethnic/religious equality. However, the practice of Soeharto's New Order regime in fact promoted disunity by exploiting its centralised power structure to plunder and marginalise Indonesia's fringe minorities, a practice adopted by Ne Win in Burma.

International conflict has largely become replaced by intransigent conflict, whereby historical elements of mistrust and prejudice have been implanted in the popular psyche through a new form of internal colonialism, enforced through education, economic and military means. In Burma, the two-tiered socio-economic society of the ruling elite and the oppressed majority is overlaid by an ethnic tier system delegating institutionalised power to the Burman over Burma's other ethnic groups. It is this factor that provides the ultimate dominance of the military junta, the SPDC. Whilst the oppression within Burma is nationwide, the stratification of ethnic groups creates a 'culture of victimisation', whereby trust and solidarity become isolated with

one's ethnic group. The likelihood of a united intra-national political opposition becomes diminished as mistrust of the oppressor extends to a mistrust of the neighbor.

This trend has occurred internationally, creating an increasing push towards the balkanisation of states, effectively a reversion to pre-modern nations based around ethnicity and geography. The international recognition of the notion of self-determination has seen an increase in separatist struggles often motivated by the belief/hope that the United Nations will assist an independence process...

Whilst Australia Karen Youth Project could be criticised for perpetuating these same divisions in Burma by having an ethnically-distinct focus, the group maintains the objective of a national solution to Burma's conflict. Self-determination for the Karen people remains a fundamental objective, not in opposition to the other ethnic groups in Burma, but in solidarity. The upcoming conference of Burma ethnic nationalities is being organised to extend the struggle towards an increased dialogue between ethnic groups in Burma. This is a small step in the broader struggle, but the significance of the issue of a genuine 'unity in diversity' is anything but small.

Source: Richard Barber, editorial, AKYP Newsletter, March, 2003.

Nominations for all positions on Admin Committee have been received.

Further nominations may be made on the day.

Appropriate forms available at entry table

September 21. AGM — prior to Guest speaker.

Self-determination for the Karen people remains a fundamental objective, not in opposition to the other ethnic groups in Burma, but in solidarity.

SWAN

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SUNDAY

21 SEPTEMBER

**Mt Martha House
Cnr the Esplanade
and Dominion Rd
MT MARTHA**

SWAN newsletter

Volume 3 Issue 5

October 2003

Special points of interest:

- Brilliant guest speaker for November meeting.
- Gwen Wilson report.
- Admin Committee for 2003-2004.
- Strip Searching research continues.
- AGM report.
- 2004 — another exciting year for SWAN!

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE 2003-2004

The newly elected Admin Committee conferred during October to organise the November meeting.

Facilitator

Carole Ford

Secretary

Maureen McPhate

Treasurer

Val McKenna

Committee Members

Alleyne Lacy

Jo Diplock

Nola Plackett

Judith Coucaud-Grale

Rosemary Draper

Debbie Roberts

The inimitable DUR-E DARA: NOVEMBER SPEAKER

Dur-e Dara, OAM has been highly successful in many fields. She says of herself, 'I am Indian by race, Malaysian by birth and an Australian by choice!'

Dur-e Dara is a Melbourne restaurateur, business woman, musician, and active in the areas of philanthropy and women's issues.

Dur-e began her hospitality career in the famed Stephanie's Restaurant during its early years, eventually becoming part owner during the last ten years of its fame as one of Melbourne's best restaurants. Dur-e was also a founding partner of the Pavilion restaurant in St Kilda — later renamed Donovan's.

Currently Dur-e is involved with a range of restaurants/hospitality interests. They include the Nudel Bar in Bourke Street, Melbourne; the EQ Cafebar at the Concert Hall of the Victorian Arts Centre; and last but not least, the tea merchants Tea Corporation in Prahran. Dur-e's experiences, then, makes her a well-qualified President of the Victorian Wineries Tourism Council.

Reflecting her interest in women's issues Dur-e Dara is currently Convener of the Victorian Women's Trust.

Her commitment to philanthropy, music and business is demonstrated in the positions she currently holds: Vice President of Philanthropy

Australia; Board member of the Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition; and Board member of the Business Matrix Australia.

Dur-e Dara has lived, worked and performed in Melbourne for thirty-three years. During this period she has partnered and performed with Melbourne artist, sculptor and musician, David Tolley, helping to rear his two children. Dur-e adds that 'I am also blessed with a granddaughter who is now a teenager'.

DUR-E DARA

- Feminist/activist
 - Business woman
 - Musician
 - Convener Victorian Women's Trust
 - Vice President Philanthropy Australia
- 16 NOVEMBER.**

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – REPORT

Again I have had the privilege of facilitating the Southern Women's Action Network (SWAN) for a most successful year in 2002-2003. Attendances at bi-monthly meetings have continued to be extremely positive, and members have maintained high

levels of community activism on a diversity of issues. It is encouraging to recognise so many familiar faces at meetings, as well as welcoming new members.

I acknowledge and warmly congratulate all committee

members for their input and commitment to the advancement of SWAN. Their initiative and flexibility has certainly contributed to the quality of the group's overall performance, and reflects the effectiveness of a non-hierarchical administrative

AGM report...continued

2003-2004 ADMIN COMMITTEE

- Carole Ford
- Val McKenna
- Maureen McPhate
- Alleyne Lacy
- Jo Diplock
- Nola Plackett
- Judith Coucaud-Graley
- Rosemary Draper
- Debbie Roberts

The emphasis on promoting women's leadership and knowledge, in keeping with SWAN philosophy, has been a focus of group development

Structure. The manner in which individual members provide support for each other and tackle any task is exemplary. While I have refrained from individualising on the activities of specific members, I take the prerogative of mentioning and thanking supporters Alan, Gerry and Ron for so willingly assisting with setting up and organising the meeting room, and Amy for chairing the AGM.

The excellent standard of invited speakers, including Sharan Burrow, Inaam Barakat, Kate Durham, Dr June Factor, Glynis Romanes and Morag Fraser, has ensured lively and timely discussion. On behalf of the committee and members generally I express our appreciation to all the women who have so generously volunteered their time to ensure the on-going relevance of SWAN.

The emphasis on promoting women's leadership and knowledge, in keeping with SWAN philosophy, has been a focus of group development. The com-

mittee, however, did organise a very well attended community meeting, at which Summa Hamid shared her critical analysis of the impact of war on women and children in Iraq.

Communication has been effectively maintained through a comprehensive bi-monthly newsletter, distributed to all members. At meetings, active participation is also encouraged through the introduction of a range of initiatives via the 'share table'. These areas of activism have included support for refugees, asylum seekers and women in areas of armed conflict; defence of the integrity and quality of the ABC; support for Heather Osland; defence of the Medicare system, particularly bulk billing; environmental concerns — for example the retention of Point Nepean and Devil Bend Reservoir as public spaces; input to the Women's Policy Unit; issues of domestic violence, mental health, housing and women's health and well-being; and women creating social change. Currently, a re-

search group is pursuing the elimination of strip searching of women in prisons.

I am delighted by the continued success of SWAN, and feel confident that it will remain an important focal group for women on the Mornington Peninsula.

(Dr) Carole Ford,
SWAN facilitator.



Carole Ford, SWAN facilitator, has been appointed co-convenor for the Victorian Committee organising the National Conference for the Association of Women Educators!

Congratulations, Carole!

AKYP INVITATION TO SWAN MEMBERS

**Want to know more about the Karen people in Burma?
Attend the AKYP Conference
Monday
3 November
7-15 Rossmoyne Street
THORNBURY**

The Australia Karen Youth Project has invited SWAN members to observe day three of a conference on Ethnic Reconciliation and Democracy in Burma on Monday 3 November at 'Minajalku', 7-15 Rossmoyne Street, Thornbury.

The conference involves par-

ticipants from Burma based in Australia. It will focus on reconciliation and development in Burma and is based around a community theatre/cultural action model, which is an effective and participatory tool for cross-cultural facilitation.

Immediately following the con-

ference there will be a presentation followed by open discussion at 6pm. Dinner — traditional food will be at 7pm. If wanting to attend the dinner, however, you need to contact Christina by 25 October.

Christina: 0415 538 096.

Australian Karen Youth Project...Gwen Wilson

In colorful Burmese dress Christina Browning, Waan and Chitlu (with guitar), addressed the September meeting, informing us of the plight of the Karen minority group in Burma of some 8 million people, 120,000 of whom live on the Thai border. Those living on the border and in the jungle — approximately 90,000 — are persecuted by the military regime.

Families struggle to exist and

truly need the support of the international community to bring about positive change.

Despite the conditions, Karen supporters provide workshops for education of adults and children enabling them to return to their communities and provide leadership.

Chitlu, a young Burmese man with a sensitive and gentle voice, sang and played guitar. His first song was a form of prayer for the future of the chil-

dren and included the words 'when the children cry, let them know we try...when the children sing, let the new world begin'. Later, Chitlu gave a haunting rendition of his own composition 'On the other shore'

Waan lived much of her young life in the jungle camp, whereas Chitlu had lived in the city, later moving out to the border. Both are strongly moved to help their people. Christina Browning is an integral part of the AKYP.

**AKYP
Invites
SWAN members
to
observe day three
of a
conference on
Ethnic Reconciliation
and Democracy in Burma
7-15 Rossmoyne St
Thornbury
(Melways Ref 30 G5)
10am-4pm
MONDAY 3 NOVEMBER
More info:
Christina 0415 538 096**

Strip Searching sub-committee reports...

The outcome document of the Elimination of Strip Searching in Victorian Women's Prisons SWAN sub-committee is taking shape in draft form. The following is an extract from the chapter 'Setting the Scene', written by Carole Ford:

Strip searching of women in

prison is not a trendy topic likely to capture public imagination. While 'the prison' may have a lengthy history of academic analysis, issues of women's imprisonment are of relatively recent origin. Only in the past two decades have aspects of women's subjectivity

and agency as prisoners become a focus for sociological study. The increase in research, particularly in feminist research, demonstrates how women have been marginalised in the discussion, subsumed under a mantle of gender-neutrality implied by the term 'prisoner'.

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SWANers attend LIBERTY VICTORIA symposium

Seven SWAN members attended a symposium organised by Liberty Victoria and Free Speech Victoria at the University of Melbourne Law School under the title 'Be alarmed! Freedom's Under Threat!'

The symposium was supported by the Institute for Compara-

tive and International Law; the University of Melbourne Law School; Federation of Community Legal Centres; Catholic Commission for Justice, Peace and Development; and the Human Rights Alliance of Australia. The 'war on terror' has made significant inroads into

the rights and freedoms enjoyed by Australians. Workshop topics included: The treatment of refugees & Asylum Seekers; the Pacific Solution; the Treatment of Prisoners at Guantanamo Bay Prison; Australia's terror legislation; and the marginalisation of dissent.

**2004
Promises
to be
a
great year
for
SWAN
negotiations are
under way with
speakers
you won't want to
miss!
Tell your friends
About
SWAN**

SWAN

Southern Women's Action Network



NOVEMBER MEETING SUNDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2003

MT MARTHA HOUSE

Cnr Dominion Rd and the Esplanade, Mt Martha
9.30 am

Speaker

DUR-E DARA OAM

- Feminist/activist
- Convener Victorian Women's Trust
- Vice President Philanthropy Australia
- President Restaurant & Catering Association of Vic.
- Restaurateur
- Business woman
- Musician
- Indian by race, Malaysian by birth, Australian by choice!
- Board Member Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition

TOPIC: My life as an Australian citizen!

COST \$7.00

BOOKINGS

Val McKenna 5974 3461

Maureen McPhate 5974 4096

RSVP 13 November — thank you!