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Discussion Notes
on
Community, Consumerism and Class (C.C.C.)
Ruth Crow (8/8/'89)

1. The Meaning of Words and Phrases

1.A. The word "Community" (see page 17 of C.C.C.)

"We use the word 'community' with the opposite meaning of 'social mix'; its very essence and value is not a grouping of like-minded people but a group of people irrespective of their differences. They may take common action over an issue that affects them, but this does not obliterate the different lifestyles or different standpoints of individuals any more than, for example, job action has such affect....."

"The essences of neighbourliness and job mateship is the acceptance of others at greeting level, even if you do not approve of their lifestyle, their religion, or their party politics, and even if you do not feel like developing a lasting close relationship with them."

1.B. The word "Consumerism" (see page 37 of C.C.C.).

"The prevalence of the consumerist ethos, with all needs, real and fancied, purchased on the market means that many services tend to be provided in such a way as to deny people control over their own lives. Thus part of the struggle against capitalist hegemony is the 'community creating' movement."

1.B.a. Consumerism as used in an article by Ruth Crow, "Women in Suburbia", Ecoso Exchange Newsletter 1976).

"Consumerism flourishes in our suburbs because the privatism of suburban living assist the market to try to foist on to everyone a life-style which expects each family to own privately the goods and services which were supplied in the past, and can be supplied now, much more effectively by the community for community use. At the same time women become more vulnerable as they substitute possession of things for relationships with people and identify themselves with the sexist advertising which is an integral part of consumerism. Consumerist satisfaction are pale substitutes for the avenues of self fulfilment which tend to be excluded from suburban life."

1.C The word "Class" (see page 32 of C.C.C.)

"But once the working class is defined as those who are employed by capital to create surplus value - and their like numbers in the public service - we get a definition of working class as follows....."

- (a) Industrial workers, mainly in factories, mines and transport.
- (b) Non-manual workers in trade/shops/offices/factories/transport.
- (c) Part of the intellectually and technically trained workers in industry and services.
- (d) Rural workers.
- (e) Women doing unpaid work at home or who move in and out of workforce.
- (f) The unemployed.-
- (g) Pensioners and retired workers."

- 1.D. The word "Hegemony" (See page 34 of C.C.C.)

"Ruling class hegemony is not something masterminded by a multi-national 'think tank' and cunningly inserted by deliberate State intervention. Rather it grows naturally out of the changing relationships of production and exchange. Support for the car way of life, as a general ethos, appears to originate from workers who, with no other option open to them, seem to initiate the demand for low density outer-suburban sprawl, and for more and better roads, as well as the demand for professional support services to overcome the isolation to which this process subjects them.

1.E. The word "Collective" (See page 9 C.C.C.)

"Experience has shown that such collective efforts have a liberating effect for people who have had poor opportunities for meeting regularly with other people, let alone working in a collective fashion."

1.E.a. "Collective" as used in an information paper by Ruth Crow published by community child Care in 1976, called "Searching for Answers on child Care".

"CCC uses the word 'collective' rather than the word 'interact'. The reason for doing this is to emphasis that in participatory efforts like community child care, people have found that they can do together what they are unable to do as individuals. A collective is thus much more than a group of individuals.

"A collective means a team of people, for which, since there is a common purpose, there begins to develop a spirit of each contributing as best she or he can, some with one kind of skill, others with different skills, but all with a quickening appreciation of each other, all teaching and learning from each other, all developing greater awareness and communication of common aims."

1.F. The phrase "Neighbourhood Focal Areas" (see page 17 C.C.C.)

"Areas of strong neighbourhood focal centres can provide the conditions for people from all walks of life to subconsciously accept each other on 'nodding acquaintance' basis. Only some of these acquaintances are likely to blossom, through the sharing of experiences into friendships."

1.F.a. Neighbourhood Focus in 'Citizens Action Plan for North and West Melbourne' published by the North Melbourne Association in 1973.

"A neighbourhood focus is an area in a district which is distinguished by the fact that people who live or work or are being educated in the vicinity are attracted to come to it or to pass through it frequently. The more varied the 'attractions' the wider the range of people that will be drawn to it and the time spent by the people at the focus will tend to be longer.

"An essential feature of a neighbourhood focus is that some of the spaces either indoor or outdoor, are not publicly owned. Such public space can only be 'attractive' if it has some objects or people to whom those living or working nearby can relate."

2. Historic Context of "Community Consumerism and Class"

2.A. Political Opportunities of the Early 1980s. (See Preface to C.C.C.)

"... This is a time of crisis; there will surely be considerable restructuring of the health and welfare sector in the coming months and years, and yet the consumers, unions and the left are having great trouble agreeing on any directions or tactics."

This quote from Ric Mohr is the opening paragraph in "Community Consumerism and Class".

2.B. Labour Party in Power in C^owealth and in Vic. (See page 10 of C.C.C.)

The Labour Party had been elected to government in Victoria and in the Commonwealth. A large number of the ALP election promises, at both Victorian and Federal levels, were based on the community campaigns of the 1970s (see later). At first, some quite valiant attempts were made to involve the community with implementing some of the election program.

Three Victorian examples, which very much affected the community movements, were the Human Services Programs Report, the Review of Early Childhood Services and the Social Justice Strategy. There were also several others.

In the early 1980s the Victorian Government's long-term alternative plans for the metropolis had many similarities to the model suggested by environmentalist in "Seeds for Change". A report, on the "Seeds" model, "Steps Towards a Better Melbourne - a Community View" was prepared jointly by representatives from the Community Energy Network, Train Travellers Association, Community Child Care, the Energy Committee of the Municipal Association and the Town and Country Planning Association. Briefing session on this report were held with a number of Government Ministers.

2.C. Reforms to Local Government (in Victoria). (See page 10 C.C.C.)

In addition to preparing the Human Services Programs Report the Victorian Government was attempting to introduce other changes at local government level, for example the review of boundaries and the return of democracy to the "sacked" councils.

Before Labour was elected to govern, in 1979, the Victorian Government, with considerable community participation, had examined the role, structure and administration of Local Government.

This report identified the three fold-role of Local Government:-

- * community representation and participation;
- * development of community resources;
- * ensuring effectiveness in service delivery.

2.D. Strength of Community Movement at Local Govt. Level (Vic.).

The 1970s was a period during which new types of community-based organisations flourished, for example Community Child Care, the Learning Exchanges and the Community Schools. It was also a period during which new-types of urban action groups, anti-uranium mining groups and environmental organisations were initiated.

No doubt, similar movements developed in other states and in many other parts of the world.

Three unique environmental movement in the late 1970s were :-

- * Municipal Councils declaring themselves "Nuclear Free Zones".
- * The Conservation of Urban Energy Group.
- * The Environmentalists for Full Employment. (See page 46 C.C.C.)

It is worth noting that the first Nuclear Free Municipality in the world was in Victoria. This movement depended very greatly on the strength of the links between local government and the anti-uranium and peace movements, and other community organisations such as urban action groups.

The Conservation of Urban Energy Group (CUE), which was initiated by the Victorian Conservation Council, was also the result of coalitions being formed between community-based organisations. There does not seem to have been other similar groupings in other states.

The Environmentalists for Full Employment (EFFE) was a response by the Australian Conservation Foundation to union and community concerns. EFFE was an Australian-wide organisation and was particularly helped by activists from Sydney and Newcastle, but the main contribution in sustaining EFFE was from Victoria where there seemed to be a more effective community and union base to keep the organisation viable.

These three examples are cited to emphasise the fact that in Victoria there appears to have been opportunities for forming unexpected coalitions between community organisations which do not seem to have developed in other states. This may mean that the Victorian community movement has different strength from those in other parts of Australia.

3. Comparing N.S.W. and Victoria

3.A. Using Child Care as an Example (See page 8 C.C.C.)

Five differences, which have their roots in the different history of the two states, are listed in C.C.C. The two most significant are :-

- * Of Federal child care money paid through local government, about 40% goes to Victoria as against 23 % for NSW.
- * In Victoria, 75 % of Local Government Councils are involved in child care whereas in N.S.W. there are only about 8 councils out of approximately 200 (early 1980s figures).

4. Building on Strengths (See pages 42 to 46 C.C.C.)

The aim of writing "Community Consumerism and Class" was to achieve the maximum unity of action of progressives, whether theoreticians or in the field. Three levels of unity are proposed in the final pages:-

- * unity of long term aims (goals)
- * unity of methods and directions towards those goals (strategies)
- * unity of short term aims to implement strategy.

C.C.C. states that "Where differences appear, it is better to look for acceptable positive contributions made by the contestants, and to build on the strength of each, rather than leave a critique to stand as something potentially divisive."