Report by Ruth Crow for the North and West Melbourne Community
Health Centre Committee of Management Meeting on Tuesday, Feb 10th.

Comments on the use of the term "Sense of Community" in report
prepared by the North Melbourne Tenants' Association on Estate
Improvements(First Draft) August, 1986.

Page 12 lists six threads in " a complex fabric of social attitudes
and relationships". They are all good points but are based on the
romantic myth of community conveying the concept of a harmonious,
homogeneous residential group. Assuming that all people have
localised social relationships.

In the 1973 C.A.N. Report (Citizen's Action Plan for North and West
Melbourne) prepared by the North Melbourne Association has a section
on"Social Mix". stating three stages of integration (or community
development) These are : - ""Live and Let Live"... recognising
a nd accepting differences... ie. being on nodding acquaintance.
A "Fair Go For All" ... supporting others even if we do not agree
with them, and Integration through co-operation ... working together
on some common projects..   (Extract enclosed).

The Tanents' Council starts with the third stage.It is like expecting
a baby to run befor it can crawl !

An earlier report "High Living" (A Syudy of Family Life in the
North Melbourne Housing Commission Flats) by Anne Stevenson, Elaine
Martin and Judith O'Neill in1967 reported that some tenants
were dissatisfied with the neighbourhood because there was too much
contact between neighbours/

In 1984 a report "Community, Consumerism and Class" (An examination
of the Works of Martin Mowbray on "Localism") was published by Ruth
and Maurie Crow, the emphasis is "Social Mix"... recognising
differences. This report recognises that the process of creating
community is part of the struggle for people to have control over
their own lives. (Extract enclosed).

"The complex fabric of social attitudes and relationships" para 5
page 12 of the Tenants' Association Report lists six threads
and appears to give equal value to each of the six.

However, in fabrics some threads have different values from others,
some may need to be used earlier than others, and also in
some fabrics part of the texture is where there are no threads at all.

The reports referred to above include other ideas on community fabric
and in particular the need to see the importance of the at least
three stages in "ascending possibilities " as referred to in the C.A.N
Report.

The Tenants' paper. leaves out the vital first 'steps'........
1) "Live and Let Live" ... that is the recognition of differences
between people and groups...
2) " A Fair Go For All" the beginning of the recognition of the needs
of others.

More-over, the Tenants' Association document: lays emphasis on
social attitudes and social relationships.... but there is quite a
proportion of people who do not have such relationships and do not want
them in the locality.   . Thus such people could be regarded as the
holes in the fabric so far as local community is concerned.

It is realised that the above ideas are implied in the report but
they also need to be stated and acted upon. Otherwise there is a
tendency to expect too much from the community and to have the
organisations disappointed and demoralised.

It is important to aim at the processes that will develop the six
points in the report, but also to base action on the recognition of
"lower" levels of relationships and attitudes.

The use of the phrase "shared living arrangement" would not be a
"shared attitude" and its use in the context of this part of the
report indicates the tendency to expect too much from others.

This is from the chapter on the "Principles of Neighbourhood Focus"

As stated in the section of this report on "A Mixed and Participatory City", some of these activities may require people with specialised skills to assist the participatory effort.

There is a pronounced shift in the national economy to the tertiary industries. Services constitute the bulk of the output of the tertiary industries and the projection for the future shows that in the future this will be even more pronounced.

This should result in the provision of new fields of employment directed at enabling greater community participation. The national economy can afford this;

The direction for development in this field is already taking shape in the appointment by councils of such officers as social workers, recreation officer, community workers, arts officer. The job descriptions for some of these new council appointments had hardly been coined ten years ago.

Also important is to increase the number of appointments for the long established council employees such as librarians, nurses, kindergarten teachers; in addition, new fields for community services will require different staff from that which has previously been employed. Some of these new responsibilities are indicated in this report.

Social Mix.

The population can be regarded as consisting of a series of interpenetrating social worlds, the components of which can be identified in such groupings as children, young people, elderly people, industrial workers, white collar workers, itinerant workers, employers, shopkeepers, tenants, home owners, people with problems, members of service organisations, migrants and many more. (See Appendix 2.)

As the C.A.N. plan is for social mix the value of studying such a population profile is less than if the proposals were being made to serve one particular age group, social, sporting or cultural needs. To retain social mix in North and West Melbourne, the facilities should serve a wide range of interests and involve people from as many backgrounds as possible.

The proposals for neighbourhood focus are not dependent on the proposition that it is necessary to create a fully integrated "community" before a neighbourhood focus can be developed.

However, focal centres in a district such as North and West Melbourne, where there exists such a wide cross-section of age groups, occupations, and nationalities, can enable easy social mixing and assist integration. It is possible to distinguish three stages in ascending possibility towards such integration.

The first simple stage is the concept of "live and let live" which is the basic value on which the C.A.N. report is based. This means the protection of all groups from being forced out of the district by economic or any other pressures.

The second stage has the more ambitious concept expressed by the phrase "Fair Go For All". To carry this out it is necessary to advocate the provision of amenities for each main culture and sub-culture and life style.

Thirdly, the achievement of integration through co-operation. This necessitates design to encourage interpenetration between individuals of different groups and between groups.

There is no hard and fast line between these three stages and, in life, these relationships often exist simultaneously.

Extract from "Community Consumerism and Class" (R. and M.Crow 1984)

Martin Mowbray B.S.W (N.S.W.)M. Soc. Syud(Sydney), lecturer, School of Sovial Work University of N.S.W had written more than 16 papers on various aspects of localism and community. He reagrds the word "community" as a __Mythical Sprayed-on Solution...__ "the aerosol word of the 1970s because of the hopeful way it is sprayed over det riorating instititions."1..

Martin Mowbray wrote some of the papers with Lois Bryson.

A number of Victorian community groups were concenred about this analysis and Rth and Maurie Crow wrote "Community, Consumerism and Class" in 1984 to assist discussion on this important social issue.

Disc ssi ns were held between the Crows and Martin and a public forum was held in the North Melbourne Library. The extract gives some idea of t e points made by the Crows.

"Community, Consumerism and Class" is now out of print but he 54 page document can be photostated if need arises.

5. Some Dubious Conclusions.

Without detracting from the value of the above-mentioned insights by Mowbray,and much useful and painstaking research, we believe that some of his conclusions are not helpful.

They seem to call in question the value of a struggle for people to control their own services,and the proposed strategy and tactics for dealing with deceptive notions that form part of the capitalist hegemony tend to be knee-jerk and inflexible.

Moreover,the analysis of the role of local government does not deal with the post-war impact of the global corporations and the Mowbray concept of "working class",althoug' not defined,could likely be - from other indications - a narrow one.

Discouraging Use of the Word "Community"

We agree that "community" (as well as other terms such as "local control" or "self-help" etc.) __can__ be used to blur class interests and serve to legitimate social control in the interests of the ruling class hegemony. What we also believe is that the same notion of community can and should be used in reverse by working people to assist themselves to organise a counter-hegemonic effort against the capitalists and especially against the global corporations.

For this reason we cannot accept the Mowbray and Bryson advice to "discourage the rash use of the term community and promote the use of substitutes with less extensive and problematic evaluative meanings such as locality,district, area,town,suburb,city,municipality,population,category, country" (52)

Of course,one should never do anything "rash",but from the context of the whole article,it is hard to detect any use of the word that the authors <u>would</u> regard as a non-rash legitimate use.

Mowbray and Bryson's objections seem to be of two kinds which it is important to distinguish:-

(a) One objection to the word is that it evokes a notion of "romantic community" which they justifiably dismiss as unrealisable. But because people think that it is realisable,they are taken in by the word,and therefore actions by the authorities become acceptable because coloured by rosy expectations.
(b) The other objection,associated with the attack on localistic notions is that "community",by its very nature is a non-class or cross-class idea,or,at least a non-political idea that distracts from a progressive political struggle against the capitalist hegemony.

We have three comments to make on use of the word "community".

<u>Three Comments on "Community"</u>

(1) <u>Straw-man and common usage</u>

Regarding the romanticised community objection,the Mowbray treatment of the subject has a strong "straw man" element in the argument. Who said that the word "community" conveys a romanticised concept of harmonious benevolence homogeneously suffused throughout a residential group ? Once having arbitrarily attributed to the word such extreme emotive overtones,it is not hard to knock over your own "straw man" by proving that such mutually affectionate relationships do not eventuate,and to ascribe hypocracy or naivety to those who use the term.

We use the word "community" with the opposite meaning of a "social mix": its very essence and value is not a grouping of likeminded people but a grouping of people irrespective of their differences. They may take common action over an issue that affects them,but this does not obliterate the different lifestyle or different standpoint of individuals any more than,for example,job action has such an effect.

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

But more local friendships will result than under circumstances in which no regular nodding takes place. Today's car-based suburbs make it easy for like-minded people to seek each other out,and totally ignore those who do not conform to their set of values. Because of the car, their friends often live in random directions and sometimes at long distances,and in visiting each other they by-pass many likeminded potential friends living quite close,but whom they simply do not know.

The essence 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. That is how we see the concept "community".

Rather than use this word at all,however,Mowbray invites us to use words with "less extensive and problematic evaluative meanings such as locality,district,area,town,suburb,city, municipality,population,category or country".Unfortunately, none of these substitutes contains any of the social or political meaning - or rather shades of meaning - conveyed by the word "community" as used in everyday life. For example,whatever romantic or unromantic flavour is ascribed to the word "community",the concept does distinguish such a grouping of people from State or Establishment bureaucracies, from private enterprise,from institutionalised welfare agencies,from party political organisation,and from local government administration. And the phrase "community of interest" seems to us as neutral and unromanticised as any general concept can be.

We think it unreal to try to discourage usage of the word. Marxists,at all events,would never dream of any "community" in such static unreal terms as the romantic community - even under socialism or communism. Given the entrenched unromantic shades of meaning of "community" it would be even more unreal to expect non-Marxist progressives to banish the word.

But we strongly support analysis such as that of Mowbray and Bryson which examines and exposes humbug calculated to mislead - wherever,in fact,this is happening.

(2) A Play on Words - And How to Counterplay.

Mowbray and Bryson's second ground of objection - the mis-use of the word by various authorities and agencies to legitimate and even strengthen capitalist hegemony - raises real difficulties for the progressive movement. These particular devices to hoodwink the working people on social welfare issues may be new,but the principles are not.

Right from the inception of their rise to rule as a class, the capitalists have used progressive-sounding ideas acceptable to the working people to camouflage their class domination over their workers. "Liberty,equality and fraternity" is a classical example. However,none of these basic concepts are ones which the working people have jettisoned or should jettison because they have been abused and misused by the capitalists. As Mowbray has demonstrated, this game of playing on words to consolidate central control is rife now - and will no doubt continue.

Lenin in "Left Wing Communism - An Infantile Disorder" gives some sensible tactical advice in cases where the bourgeosie or their political parties,as in England,produce high-sounding ideals that command solid support among the workers. The workers should say,in effect: "we agree with that ! We support that! But we judge you by results!" Inability to

to produce results can then be used to strengthen the workers cause. (53).

The question is not whether words that have had values with which working people strongly identify can be taken by the Establishment and made into romanticised or "motherhood" words and misused to legitimate a continuation of capitalist control - of course they can ! The more important question is the best way to respond to such tricks so that the worker's cause does not suffer from confusion and demoralisation,which is what the Establishment and their agencies intend.

Those who support "community" are accused by Mowbray and Bryson of having a "remarkable capacity to allow nostalgia to override systematic analysis." because they are trying to "graft back on today's social organisation a feature from pre-capitalist times." (54).

This remark can only be applied "to whom the cap fits",that is,to those who fancy themselves as reviving a romanticised pre-capitalist situation. It certainly does not apply,for example,to those who support the cluster and connect model for Melbourne's future. This does not propose a revival of pre-capitalist conditions,or even pre-war conditions,but a swing forward to a new way of linking public transport and social activity. It is different from the suburban pattern of a few decades ago in that what is now required is a deliberate involvement of people in making these links.

To condemn talk of re-creating community as unrealisable nostalgia is about as sensible as it would be to condemn Marx on the grounds that he proposed the very much more formidable task of reviving pre-class-society social organisation,namely,communism. Marx did not nostalgically propose the re-establishment of what he called "primitive communism" in its earlier forms,but a non-class communism based on the best of civilised society.

Similarly,the cluster and connect case does not rest on pre-car nostalgia,but on re-arranging local conditions to make it possible for people to do together what they cannot achieve in isolation from each other.

If capitalism,with all its immense technological capacity, cannot marshall its resources to organise its major cities along the more human,more ecologically sound and more economically efficient cluster and connect lines,then there may well be a lot more people looking to socialism as a system that can achieve just such results.

The view of Mowbray and Bryson,however,is apparently that community cannot exist unless there are stable patterns of interaction between people,as there were in pre-capitalist conditions.The economic requirements of modern capitalism, they argue,demand high rates of residential mobility and high rates of personal mobility to work,shopping,education and recreation.

Granted. But there are two factors this argument overlooks.

There is now a very much shorter working week,so there is

potentially more leisure time available to breadwinners locally,both daily and in the weekends. Even more significant, the daily or weekly personal mobility is based on private transport which enables a cardriver to go any distance,in any direction,at any time. It is excess of undirectionalised mobility,rather than general capitalist economic requirements that destabilises potentially stable associations at urban nodes within the low-density suburbs.

But this condition can be remedied by bringing access to many human needs not only nearer to where people live,but also made accessible by walking or public transport that can match the car in physical convenience for many purposes, and out-class the car by creating favourable conditions for some sort of meaningful human contact that is constant enough to be rewarding.

The Mowbray and Bryson argument does not take this turn, however. In saying that the degree of mobility required by capitalism prevents community forming at all,and therefore use of the word can only be a hoax,they are,in effect, taking the hegemony of the car way of life for granted.

It seems to us that to launch an attack on a word is a clumsy, confusing and even counter-productive device. Unity of progressive community forces against conservative and manipulative central strategic planning is hard enough;to disorientate the expanding but frail unity by fruitless semantic divisions over a word or a phrase is the last thing the movement wants.

In similar vein,Mowbray prescribes "dropping altogether" use of the word "radical" (55),simply because,in addition to meaning "radical left" the word has been debased to cover "radical liberal" and "radical right". If pro-working class theoreticians are to drop every word formerly found useful by progressives because it has been borrowed by pro-capitalist theoreticians,they will be left with very little political vocabulary at all!

The English working class,for example,right from the inception of their organised efforts as a class (leaving aside the very early riots) learnt how to "play with words" to hide their real intentions and activities beneath ideology borrowed from and made respectable by,the capitalists. The Webbs,in their history of trade unions, describe how,in the period when Combination Laws made unions illegal,groups of workers would meet in a back room of a local pub under cover of a religious brotherhood or a social club. Hence,incidentally, the word "steward",directly descended from the practice of this important official whose original job was collecting money from union members present,buying the beer in the tap room and serving it to the clandestine gathering!

Coming to more recent times,there are plenty of illustrations showing how practical political tactics have been found to counter the use of words calculated to mislead,divert and disorientate the union or community movements (and this applies particularly to that category Mowbray is addressing - community workers who can be easily demoralised,whether paid or not).

Take the case of whitecollar workers in Australia. Banks, insurance offices,oil companies,trustee offices,shipping offices and airways offices were formerly prime non-union workplaces. The general idea put about by employers was that if employees performed well they had a career in front of them. Each employee's promotion was then at the bosses' discretion - but this,so they were led to believe, was an entirely different system to wages awards,so they did not need unions;these were appropriate only for industrial workers.

When the whitecollar unions started to unionise these workers,they did not try to exorcise the word "career" which was mesmerising and tranquillising the employees of these big corporations. They formulated "career awards"- almost a contradiction in terms - a guaranteed system of progression which removed the discretion from the employer and the uncertainty and frustration from the employee.

For another example,Hitler called his fascist party "national socialists",but the real socialists of the world did not drop the word "socialist",nor did the communists,who were singled out for special attack,drop the word "communist" as a way of fighting this crude attempt at legitimation and scapegoating. Instead they set out to expose the ultra-conservative brutal meaning of Nazism,disclosing its connections with segments of international finance capital.

So,playing on words - and counterplaying on them - has been indulged in both on behalf of the capitalists and on behalf of the workers,and is as old as the class struggle itself. Finesse at all times is required of the players, but withdrawing a word altogether from play has never been one of the rules of the game.

(3) Historical Differences.

Another example of word-play,so close that it could be easily overlooked is this: the progressive movement appears to have been "out in front" in using the word "community" for its own purposes. In Victoria at least, Community Child Care back in the early 1970's,of its own volition,choose the word "community" to represent what they meant to describe the human relationships in "neighbourhood houses" or "community houses",and,as we have mentioned,the concept of "creating community" has spread from this founding organisation to various organisations supporting the cluster and connect model for Melbourne.

It would be unthinkable to expect Community Child Care to deny the very ideological basis of its own existence. It would be equally unthinkable for socialists to attack such an organisation for concentrating within local horizons in such a way as to "distract attention" from higher and broader political movements because the facts show that,so far from doing this,it has,on the contrary,pioneered a struggle against conservatism in State and Federal bureaucracies. In NSW and other States circumstances may be somewhat different.

In striving to "create community", although such strivings begin, admittedly, in a small local area or neighbourhood, and the participants begin with a desperate desire for social contact, experience of those involved (typically mothers with young children at the outset) helps politicise them. If, in the process of striving to obtain and manage a neighbourhood house in which to "create community" active members become politicised, what does it matter that, more recently, government departments and agencies have borrowed the words and invested them with goodness knows what other meanings?

If the "evaluative ideological assumptions of the user" (to use Mowbray's words) when using the word "community" are understood by these users as a non-commercial, non-establishment form of organisation; and if, in practice, that sort of organisation begins to lay the basis for ways of life that are alternative to the market-dictated ways, why not ?

In a word, let us keep the word "community" and invest it with a meaning that suits us, and expose attempts to have it misread against us! But above all, extend the efforts to have alternative policies adopted at local, regional, State, and Federal levels. There is no other way that masses of people becoming involved in a community effort can learn the basic politics of their situation.

How can people encapsulate the values they want to establish for the future, other than by using emotive words like Community to which they attach their own values?

"Unity" is another word frequently twisted by contestants of right and left in the industrial or political sphere. When the right talk about unity it often refers to a unity based on agreement with the capitalists accompanied by an absence of action; when the left talk about unity it invariably means unity based on action of some sort, without which the word is meaningless.

But it would be unthinkable to banish the word as a "dirty word" because it has been misused for partisan purposes, or because perfect unity is unattainable. Irrespective of the origin or history of the word "community" or "unity" or any other word, the test should be whether the concept conveyed by the word can be adapted to help people to organise against the hegemony.

Seeing Mowbray has invoked Lenin, we let Lenin have the last say: "The surest way of discrediting a new political (and not so political) idea, and to damage it, is to reduce it to an absurdity whist ostensibly defending it. For every truth, if carried to "excess" (as Dietzgen Senior said) if it is exaggerated, if it is carried beyond the limits within which it can be actually applied, can be reduced to absurdity..."(53).

If the case is, that by "spraying on" the word "community" where it cannot be applied the capitalists have reduced the word to an absurdity, let them play their game! The working class should not throw out the fact of community organisation by throwing out the word - to do so would be to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Instead they can rescue the word, invest it with their own meaning, and turn the joke on the capitalists!