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Special issue by a woman or women for women and men readers

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1. Women and Children in Urban Australia

The main section of this issue of Ecoso Exchange is an examination of the movement for femine liberation and the radical movement on urban environment in order to distinguish those common objectives which are likely to assist both movements towards the perspective of an ecologically sane society.

(a) Some ideas about two books...."Cities for Sale" and "Damned Whores and God's Police"

In order to examine the inter-relationships -- or potential for inter-relationships -- between the newly emerging movements of womens liberation and urban planning, it is useful to study two books which were published in 1975, each of which has been the result of several years research by a young radical Australian woman.

"Cities for Sale" by Leonie Sandercock and "Damned Whores and God's Police" by Anne Summers have very little in common yet they complement each other by providing essential background material on the political forces which shape our cities and on the social force which determine the lives of women.

Anne Summers has chosen the sub-title "The Colonisation of Women in Australia". Her book is about human relationships; about men women and children; thus her sphere is in essence what goes on inside the four walls of the homes, workplaces and in the social places where these domestic relationships are extended...the pubs, schools, sportsgrounds, and so on. In her pages she specifically examines the role of women.

Leonie Sandercock has chosen the sub-title: "Property, Politics and Urban Planning in Australia". Her book is about the built environment; the planning of homes, workplaces, transport systems, commercial centres and recreation spaces and so on. Thus her sphere is in essence outside the four walls of the places dominated by our domestic relationships and is mainly to do with government, administration, land speculation and community movements. In her pages she inevitably examines the role of men.

"Cities for Sale", as the name implies, is mainly about land-use planning and is an examination of the process of city planning in Australia in its political, historical, social and intellectual context, and it endeavours to show why so many good ideas and good intentions have come to so little.

Leonie sets herself the task of testing "whether a Marxist model provides a comprehensive explanation of the present structure of Australian society (p.4)

She shows how the meagre planning that has been attempted in Australia's main cities has been frustrated at every level by private ownership of land, by the influence of the speculators and profiteers and by the deification of economic growth and political power.

However, despite her intentions of making a Marxist model, and despite her useful historical research, her options for ways of changing our cities are not a Marxist challenge to capitalism. She disappoints herself; for, lacking in confidence in revolutionary changes she proposes a program of "redistributive social justice" or "civilising reforms" for achieving "the kind of community the left aims to bring about (p.250)

The piecemeal reforms she advocates fail to add a new dimension to urban planning, and she thus gives a very limited vision of the future. In fact, some of the policies she advocates could re-enforce the entrenched tendency for increasing bureaucracy and paternalism by technocrats. The various methods of participation she proposes to give "more ordinary people more say in decisions affecting the quality of their environment and daily life" are based on experiences of urban pressure groups (resident action, conservationists, anti-pollution campaigns etc). She seems to be unaware of the significance of the liberation movement of blacks and women, and thus does not consider how such forces are an integral part of all campaigns for social change.

Leonie is disappointed in her own conclusions and sadly she asks the last question: "How do we guard against the possibility that those who already win in the market place will also be the winners in the political market place created by the new participatory procedures?" (p.251).

Leonie partly answers this question in a plea for practical reforms to be based on detailed fact finding and rigorous argument on particular issues coupled with the need to work out a conception of the good society. (See later in this review).

Another part of the answer to Leonie's question can be found in Anne Summers' "Damned Whores and God's Police". Anne repeatedly shows the futility of striving for mere "equality reforms". She sets out to show that the ruling groups which control the capitalist economy of Australia is composed entirely of white men (p.23). Any lasting liberation is impossible without challenging the present distribution of power which allows a small number of people to control the lives of the majority. The particular contribution she makes which partly finds an answer to Leonie's question, is the emphasis she gives throughout her book on the development of self management which she sees as being fully possible only if the capitalist power relationships are abolished (p.463).

Anne justifiably claims that, to date, Marxists have concentrated entirely on class relationships and class ideologies and have ignored the oppression of racism and sexism. She makes the important distinction between "feminism" and "female consciousness" (p.26), pointing out that "female consciousness" is "active acceptance of female roles". This heightened awareness, she points out, can often lead to militant action in consumer groups, resident action groups and other community activities, but it does not help to give women a greater awareness of their sex oppression and therefore does not challenge the status quo to the same extent as those who are conscious of their need for liberation. This is so, because these liberationists have identified correctly the sexist division of society which is the main way women are oppressed.

Nevertheless, in her final pages, Anne also seems to be overwhelmed by the obstacles now facing the women's liberation movement. "The sheer enormity of the many components of women's oppression has produced a feeling of impotence, a despair of ever being able to change such a multi-farious beast" (p.471)

Despite these pessimistic last pages both of these books give an overall impression of optimism.

This faith in the future is to be found in Anne's descriptions of the new types of organisations which are enabling women to take their first steps from passive acceptance of isolation and dependence through face to face experiences in networks of mutual aid towards wider control of the forces which previously have constricted their

relationships with others.

Similarly, there is no lament for planning in Leonie's descriptions of the ever-gaining popularity of the political theory that social disparities are no longer acceptable, and in the examples she gives to show how conservatism and political neutrality are being increasingly recognised as shackles that must be broken.

It is important to realise that in these campaigns, many of those with "female consciousness" or concern for urban planning, are beginning to contribute in their own way to breaking the shackles of their oppression, and should not be dismissed as hopeless, but regarded as an immense potential source for feminist liberation, given more experience, assistance and inspiration.

Until a truly non-oppressive society has been won there will continue to be need for women to independently struggle for their own identity and liberation; but in doing so, and to the extent that the overall vision can be shared by others, there will be mutual endeavour by men and women with many diverse commitments. Within these movements, those who have more advanced consciousness about the nature of oppression will become less fearful of diluting their struggle and therefore will more readily recognise the contribution others are making, and more readily identify those issues which can help raise the consciousness of those whose life experience may be more limited.

Finally, neither book deals directly with ecological issues, which are so pertinent to the subject matter of each.

A third book is needed to bring together urban planning and feminine liberation in an ecological framework. Rosemary Brown, the Canadian feminist/socialist has set the central theme for such a study in her recent talk on "Monday Conference": "The Womens Liberation Movement is a final and last ditch stand to stop the mad rush that mankind is to destroy it. As feminists we cannot separate our struggle for our own liberation.... whatever that may mean: the right to realise our full potential.... we cannot separate that from the destruction of the environment, from the wanton waste of our resources; we cannot separate that from the kinds of things that humanists and environmentalists around the world are doing." (Vashti's Voice, Spring 1975.)

1. (b) Child Care ... An Expediency or a Human Right

"Ecoso Exchange" here reprints an "Information Paper" which was published in 1975 by Community Child Care. It is the text of a talk given by Ruth Crow to a Three Cs meeting. Some other information on Community Child Care is published in this issue in the section "Worthwhile Reading"

Historically the provision of child-care has been justified as a means of solving pressing social and economic problems of particular groups (of particular families or particular needs of industry). For example: to rescue children from squalor; to provide a workforce in wartime; to enable welfare or low-income families to be self-supporting; to retain special skills in the workforce (e.g nurses, teachers, university staff). Thus child-care has been provided in a piece-meal way as an expediency.

Pressure for childcare as an expediency will continue to dominate until such time as there is a generally accepted vision of childrens centres that are based on the community.

But, by the words "based on the community" it is not enough to see parents or children or the community as they are now. What is required is a fusion of the deepest personal needs of all groups of people with the broader social ideals.

Indeed, this process around childcare can play a most important role in creating community where none now exists, or where only a poor pale partial substitute for community exists.

In other words, what we should be thinking about when we talk about community-based child-care is how to fuse personal need and social aspiration in such a style that the process creates conditions for community involvement which overcomes our alienation from each other by providing an opportunity to develop a sense of belonging.

So long as the provision of child-care is motivated by paroch or sectional interests, the facilities that are available will + paternalistically separate out and segregate children from the community and intensify the ~~stratification of the population~~

groups according to income, occupation, age, ethnicity and so on. at the same time such facilities intensify the isolation and segregation of those adults who are directly caring for the children (the majority of such 'caring' people are women under today's conditions).

What can be done to counter the inevitable trend towards creating services for children over which those who are the main consumers have such little control ?

The Vision of Community Child Care

To illustrate the development towards a human rights approach, it is timely to recall one of the first statements by Community Child Care (in the preface of the 1972 handbook),

"Child-care facilities must not be developed as 'dumping depots' or fortresses for forgotten children. We already have quite enough institutions separating the age, sex and socio-economic groups off from one another.

"To avoid institutionalization and the authoritarian attitudes that go with this, we believe that it is essential that child-care facilities develop as small co-operatively run neighbourhood groups firmly rooted in the community. They can be places which provide full day care for working mums, occasional care, emergency care for families in crisis, special services for the disadvantaged or handicapped child, and afterschool and holiday care for school aged children.

"As well they can offer companionship and a sense of usefulness to those who need to be needed and have something to give (e.g. the old and lonely)."

Thus, the significance of COMMUNITY BASED CHILD CARE was the touchstone for C.C.C. since its inception.

WorkPlace Centres.

It is from within this context that moves for child-minding at work places can be seen as developments towards provision of child-care as an expedient.

Neighbourhood or community based centres mean that :

*Children have an opportunity to grow up with other families of the neighbourhood and develop community links.

*The child does not have to change centres as the mother changes jobs.

*The child does not have to travel long distances to the centre.

*There is little likelihood of the provision of care being a controlling factor over the lives of the parents.

*There is opportunity for comprehensive facilities to be provided (family day care, before and after school activities).

*The parents will feel free to participate in the running of the centre.

Child-care based on work place contributes to :

*Providing female labour at the least possible cost.

*Forcing the child to become a commuter and to travel long distances.

*Making women more vulnerable and socially dependent on work-place.

*Reducing the opportunity of changing jobs.

*Making it more difficult to struggle for better job conditions,

*Making it more difficult to participate in improving conditions of the children's centre.

In most cases the service can be terminated whenever the sponsoring industry so desires (e.g. when women are no longer needed in work force).

Child-care services which are based on piecemeal planning to meet and expediency can be closed without much protest when the providers of the service think the facilities are no longer justified. The following warning from America should be heeded :

"Child -care centres during the depression and World War 2 were established to meet the needs of the government and not the needs of children, parents, teachers whose lives were affected by them. When the government no longer needed to provide jobs for teachers on relief work or to employ women in defence work, it closed down the centres. Although many women struggled to keep the centres open, their movement was not organised or powerful enough to change government policy". (From an article entitled 'Public Child Care, Our Hidden History' by Judy Kleinberg, published in THE Day Care Book , 1974).

Those who were involved with wartime child-care in Australia could make a similar statement. During the early 1940s a number of all day care centres were financed by the Federal Department of Labour and National Service. The story of their establishment and demise fit exactly the U.S. statement.

The object of C.C.C. is community-based child care. The significance of the word "based" is demonstrated by the following examples of how child care can be provided through co-operative effort that bridges the gap between the work place and the community.

In the school vacation during 1974 and again in 1975, school aged children of workers at I.C.I. Zipper Factory in Ascot Vale (Victoria) were cared for by a programme provided by women who were given time-off from the factory bench to care for the children. The majority of those participating in the programme were migrant families. The factory canteen was the assembly area for the children's activities and the children went from the factory to play-days organised in the neighbourhood and thus cemented relationships with the community of the district in which the families lived and the parents worked. This is a shining example of how a group of employees can plan to solve their own problems.

The gains from such co-operative efforts are far greater than the mere provision of adequate minding of children while mother works. The mothers gained in human dignity through solving their own problems and finding such ready acceptance from a wide circle of people within and outside the workplace, Australian born and migrant, professional recreation leaders and volunteers, workmates and neighbours.

Nevertheless, such efforts have an in-built contradiction in that they are built on the assumption that there is equality between employees and employers, that class conflict can be abolished through co-operative effort. This is contrary to reality. Thus these efforts may be only short lived and sporadic.

There are those who argue for child -care for particular categories of employees because they deplore the loss of professional skills from the work-force.

This was succinctly stated in an article in the 'Australian' some years ago during the debate on Gorton's Child Care Bill : "On purely economic grounds there is probably a case for the provision of creches going to women who are highly paid and thus contribute most to the economy, and depending on which way Mr. Gorton's vague policy pronouncements goes, this is exactly what would happen."

The expediency of providing work-place based child-care could strengthen this elitist selectivity. Large organisations with professionally trained staff such as universities, hospitals and schools are at present considering how to meet the needs of their workforce. For example the price of enrolling a child at the Melbourne University Family Club is \$150 per month which is somewhat out of reach of most students.

So long as these deliberations are confined to those whose immediate concern is the smooth running of institutions : i.e. managers, personnel officers, boards of directors, then there will be a natural trend towards seeking centres that provide care for the most highly trained, specialised staff (those with degrees are more likely to be given precedence over domestics).

A welcome new development is the possibility of one large metropolitan hospital co-operating with local residents to establish a community based service within which some places would be reserved for child care for staff that is in specifically short supply.

Similarly, the move for children's centres at schools are resulting in centres where there is a wide mix of families. For example, at Brunswick High School (Girls High School) the centre is used by children from the district as well as by children of those who work at the school. A school is much more than a work-place, and, in fact, can be the hub of a neighbourhood.

The three teachers organisations, the Victorian Teachers Union, the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association, and the Technical Teachers Association of Victoria have joined together in recent conferences at which child-care has been the main topic.

The only way to prevent children's services from opening and closing in response to the needs of government and industry is for these centres to be firmly based on the involvement of the people who use them.

It is axiomatic that the only way for such community control to be achieved is by more and more people having a vision of how human relationships can flourish when there are such centres of social activity on neighbourhood basis.

Thus the provision of child-care is not primarily patching up some immediate pressing problems of particular groups of people, nor providing a workforce to overcome some temporary under supply of labour (although solutions to these problems may incidentally be found by the provision of adequate facilities); but to enable a fuller social life to be made available to all members of the family and the community.

Study on Migrant Families and their Child Care Needs

A study is currently being heavily financed by International Women's Year for an investigation of child care needs of migrants in the inner suburbs of Melbourne.

There is some cause for alarm about this survey as every question in the main questionnaire assumes that the most appropriate and necessary location of child care centre is at the work place.

A number of factors could combine to contribute to make the results of the survey dramatically show that migrant families want child care located at the factories.

These include :

- *the high proportion of young migrant women in the work force.
- *the migrant's lack of knowledge of children's services that are available.
- *the poor provision of children's services in areas where there is a high proportion of migrants in the population
- *the inadequate recognition of the special needs of migrants in the existing child care services.
- *some of the migrants come from countries where the only child-care services are located at the factories and thus regard this as being the traditional and only way such facilities are provided.

The questionnaire in the study only offered women the choice of a yes/no answer and in no way tested the assumption of those conducting the study that facilities should be at the work place.

Despite the good intentions behind this study, it is an example of piecemeal, patching up approach to human problems. Child care at work places would tend to confine migrant women to an option which would generally mean a "service" which was another controlling factor over their lives. Such a lack of choice robs migrant women of having any perspective of how neighbourhood centres could be places for their families where they could more easily have a sense of belonging to the community in which they are bringing up their children.

I. (c) Children in THE PLACE

Ecoso Exchange reprints the substance of a leaflet which was distributed before and after the Radical Ecology Conference (Easter 1975), as an example, in miniature, of how urban design can favour participatory activities and social mix.

"Rather than say there is a place for children at the Radical Ecology Conference it is far more accurate to say that children will be in "THE PLACE" (concourse, foyer, hub, neighbourhood focus square square or centre) *

Note; we do not say it is a 'play' place' but it is The Place.

Thus we have chosen to locate children's facilities ** right in the hub of the Melbourne University Building ***... we have chosen to cater for children of all ages, toddlers and babies, all at the one location

Some activities of interest mainly to adults will be located in the vicinity of the area mainly used by children.

We have made these choices because.... facilities for children should be sited in the most socially valuable areas and in association with other people-intensive activities. In urban planning such facilities should be an integral part of the district centre and not pushed off onto some site that is unsuitable for most other purposes.

The main aim of providing facilities for children (and their parents) should be integration; not separation, segregation and stratification.

Facilities for children should not intensify the isolation and segregation of those adults who are directly caring for the youngster (the majority of such "caring" people are women in today's conditions)

Facilities for children at the Radical Ecology Conference are being provided for two main reasons

1. Patching up by providing a solution to a pressing problem, Many mothers (perhaps some grandmothers and a few fathers) would be unable to participate in R.E.C activities unless some provision is made for the care of their children

2. Providing a pattern for participatory planning. The planning of facilities for children at R.E.C. is a project group that has been functioning as a collective for some time previous to the Conference. It is an attempt to provide a prototype of urban design which favours participatory activities rather than consumerism.

* Neighbourhood focus or hub is an area in a district which is distinguished by the fact that people who live, work or are being educated in the vicinity are attracted to come to it and pass through it frequently.

The more varied the "attractions" the wider the range of people that will be drawn to the focus and the time spent by people who will be drawn to the focus will tend to be longer.

** The terms "children's facilities" or "children's activities" are used in this document because there are no better terms we can think of to describe what it is planned to provide. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be one word or even group of words that can conjure up the new perspectives for better human relationships which need to be fostered between the young generation and the adults of this world.

*** The Conference was held in the Melbourne University Union Building

2. WORTHWHILE READING

There are so many valuable journals being published that it is an invidious choice to direct attention to only a few of them. However, the following are of such significance that ECOSO EXCHANGE would hate you to miss out on any one of them.

(a) Habitat Vol 3 No 5; published by the Australian Conservation Foundation (Nov.-Dec. 1975)

This issue of Habitat is on the urban environment and marks the recent welcome turn by the ACF towards the ecology of cities. In the foreword of the magazine it is stated:

"Almost 80% of Australians live in cities. Daily they are confronted with urban ugliness. Often they feel no sense of belonging to the local community in which they spend most of their time. They feel alienated from the decision making process which decide their immediate environment. Is this feeling of alienation, or helplessness inevitable? This issue of Habitat covers some of the problems of urban living. It is only a beginning."

(Obtainable from A.C.F. 206 Clarendon St. East Melbourne. Price \$1.)

(b) Learning Exchange Number 37 Jan. 1976

This issue of Learning Exchange has a supplement on Parks and Creeks and has articles on campaigns and plans for the Dandenong Valley, Kororoit Creek, Koonung and Mullum Valleys, the Merri Creek, Ruffey Creek, Gardiner's Creek, Moonee Ponds Creek, the Yarra Valley. In addition it has a very comprehensive article called "Parks for People" which outlines long term plans for a network of linear parks along rivers and creeks.

(Obtainable from "L.E" 430 Waverley Rd., East Malvern. Price 50 cents)

(c) Environment News Vol. 1 No. 4 Dec 1975

This issue has short informative articles: "The Freeway Fight"; "Merri Creek Study", "Melbourne Strategy Plan", "Jackass Flat Saved", "Insecticides", "Threat to the Forests"; "The City Square", "Amory Lovins Tour", "Recycling Paper", "Glass Workers Act on Milk Bottles"

Your attention is particularly drawn to the article on "Melbourne Strategy Plan" which outlines the ecological significance of the present attacks on this plan - see last issue of Ecoso Exchange which also dealt with MCC Strategy Plan

(Obtainable Environment Centre, 324 Williams St Melb. Price, 40 cents)

(d) Community Child Care - Newsletter and Checklists

In addition to monthly "newsletter", a series of 6 Checklists such as "Design for Child Care Centres", "Community Services & Schoolage Children", "The Neighbourhood Centre". From the foreword to the Checklists: "Within most neighbourhoods there will be a number of families with childcare needs. As long as they continue to live as a heap of isolated family units, each family faces enormous difficulty in meeting its child care needs and achieving its goals. Through communicating, working collectively together and becoming a 'community' they can

THE ECOSO GUIDELINES

Outrageous Modern Trends

Today we are living in a world increasingly manipulated by advertising and propaganda for a culture of consuming rather than using, of receiving rather than participating.

We who live in western advanced countries have little choice other than to buy goods designed with built-in obsolescence. Thus a large proportion of hard work goes to fashioning materials which are misused or not fully used, so the more that is produced the more there is wasted. These same superior industrial powers force this same pattern of consumerism on the people of the Third World. Under these conditions the limited natural and human resources are not only inequitably distributed but are also recklessly squandered with outrageous pollutions and destructions of the natural environment. As for the social environment, life and thinking become dominated by material possessions and this creates a barrier making it increasingly difficult for neighbours workmates and even members of the same family to relate to each other.

There is a more efficient way of living which does more for the dignity of humans using less energy and preserving the world as a pleasant and habitable place.

Guidelines to Reverse Trends

1. A value-judgment in favour of regenerating and promotion of community participation, meaning that it is humanising and enriching for people to relate to each other through one form or another of voluntary participatory activity both on the job and off the job, exercising a measure of control in the course of such activity
2. A consequent recognition of necessity for change in life-style and behaviour patterns that sees the quality of life as an alternative to consumerism understood as mass production and consumption of wasteful and unsatisfying consumer goods and services based on compulsion or manipulation.
3. Accordingly a policy of restricting the use of energy and non-renewable resources per head and hence a planned design of community including population size where human can better relate to human and nature in order to reduce wasteful goods and services at the same time guaranteeing an adequate minimum subsistence to all, and using modern technology to this end.
4. The recognition that such objectives cannot be achieved either on the basis of partial linear one-level ecological remedies or with authoritarian or manipulative control of production or affairs but require a comprehensive multi-directional all-level and participating effort to achieve global ecological equilibrium

For old and new readers..... ~~SECRET~~ NOW AVAILABLE !!

The Last Radical Ecology Conference National Network

This information network is a subject and alphabetical listing of knowledge, activities, interests, people and organisations involved in the environment movement. It developed through four expanding editions during the building of a self-managed, self-financed conference, the Radical Ecology Conference. It is now a record of that national get-together in Melbourne over Easter 1975, and it reflects its autonomous activist character.

Available:

Melbourne readers: c/o P.O.Box 132 Carlton South 3053
 or c/o Ecoso Exchange Malvern
 or c/o Learning Exchange 450 Waverly Rd East
 Other readers Hobart Radical Ecology Group c/o Dept. of
 Environmental Design TCAE GPO Box 1415P
 Hobart Tas. 7001

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