



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

Ecoso exchange newsletter 2/8; Jan. 1990

This is the Published version of the following publication

UNSPECIFIED (1990) Ecoso exchange newsletter 2/8; Jan. 1990. Ecoso exchange newsletter, 2 (8). pp. 1-10.

The publisher's official version can be found at

Note that access to this version may require subscription.

Downloaded from VU Research Repository <https://vuir.vu.edu.au/16272/>

ECOSO EXCHANGE NEWSLETTER

No 2/8, Jan. 1990

ISSN 1033 9205

This issue is mainly about local government and the trans-nationals but includes some information on community development.

Contents

Page 1	Destablising Local Government
3	Book Review; "The Third Wave"
4	The Melbourne City Council Strategy Plan Saga
6	Hints on Community Development
9	Volunteerism and Women

Enclosures

Index to Ecoso 2/1 to 2/8
Subscription Form for Next Six Newsletters
Invitation to Gathering in the Gloaming

Destablising Local Government Witch-hunts at Melbourne Town Hall

Using parliamentary privilege, an ALP Member of Parliament, Neil Cole, has stated that there is corruption in the Melbourne City Council. The target of the accusation is an independent councillor, Cr Trevor Huggard, who has been active in community organisation since the early 1970s. Recently Cr Huggard has been in the forefront of opposition to some of the development projects for the municipality and has helped to involve the community in various ways behind these campaigns.

Reminder of Cold War Attacks

Those who remember the Cold War days, of the Sharply Commission (1949) and the Petrov Inquiry (1953 to 1954) know how the frame-ups, smears and other witch-hunt tactics resulted in evidence to show that there had been no ballot rigging and other undemocratic practices.

During these dark days the Left Movement had to spend hours and hours for week after week retracting the charges in the courts. Families and individuals had to cope with having their names besmirched. Attention had to be diverted from campaigning on other issues.

Diversion from Main Planning Issues

The witch hunt into corruption in the Melbourne City Council, which was initiated by a statement in the Victorian Parliament in November 1989, has many similarities to the unscrupulous Cold War tactics.

Hours and hours of Council time (paid for by rate-payers) is being used to comb through Melbourne City Council documents.

Some councillors names are being besmirched by innuendo and their time and money wasted in defending themselves instead of attending to the interests of the ratepayers.

Attention is being diverted from the main planning issues around the Multi-functional Polis (MFP), the Very Fast Train (VFT), the Docklands Development, the redevelopment of the Carlton Brewery site and the implementation of the Melbourne City Council Strategy Plan.

Community confidence in the integrity of the Labour Government has been weakened.

Demoralising to Community Organisations

Charges of corruption in local government are resulting in community organisation loosing their confidence in this form of democracy. Community-minded activists could well be discouraged from standing for local councils.

In muck raking situations, no matter how innocent the person or organisation is, a certain amount of "muck" sticks. It is harder for community representatives and community organisations to clear their names than it is for trade unionist and for unions as a whole.

In the Cold War the history of trade unions and the daily experiences of the employees on the job partly protected the union movement from the worst effects of the witch hunts.

On the contrary, local government has no such protection. In fact the history of local government, right from its inception is full of "wheeler and dealer" scandals, exemplified by the Tommy Bent land rackets of the last decades of the nineteenth century and continuing right up to the present time (so well exposed by Leonie Sandercock in her various books).

Also, the daily experiences of community organisations have taught community activists, repeatedly, to be rather cynical about land use planning and the power of the big developers over the decisions of local government. They expect rackets, but not from community representatives.

A New Era of Witch-hunting

In the 1950s, when Australian economy was based on manufacture (and the increasing investment by the United States in this) the trade unions were the prime target of the Right. The hidden agenda was to get a cheap work force. (See review of "The Third Wave" in this Ecoso Newsletter.)

Today, when Australian economy is so closely tied up with trans-national finance capital (British, United States, Japanese etc), the Right is targetting the organisations and people who they think are obstructing the land speculators. The hidden agenda is to hasten opportunities for trans-national investments in real estate.

In the 1980s, beginning with the dismissal of the Melbourne City Council on trumped up corruption charges, and continuing with red baiting over the Lord Mayoral launching of "Make Melbourne Marvellous" and other "scandals" in a number of municipalities, there have been consistent attacks by the Right to discredit local government and the community representatives who have been changing the nature of this form of democracy and bringing it closer to the people. No doubt this has been also happening in other States.

Big Business and the Melbourne City Council

Until the middle of the twentieth century the Melbourne City Council was dominated by elected representatives of big businesses located in the central area; estate agents, the business owners and managers and the emporium directors and other large enterprises.

These property-based councillors were loosely organised in the Civic Group and it had considerable power in the Melbourne City Council until the end of the 1970s. Since then, with the growth of community movements in the residential neighbourhoods, the political character of the Council has changed.

For the past, almost, ten years there has been a loose coalition between the community (independent) councillors and the Australian Labour Party councillors. The November accusations, by the ALP Member of Parliament for the electorate covering the municipality, have weakened, and most probably destroyed, the frail links between these two groups.

It is worth noting that big business (in today's circumstances the transnationals and/or the chain store directors) does not seek to have direct representation at municipal level.

As has been well experienced by community organisation, particularly those involved in the 18 year campaigns around the Melbourne City Council Strategy Plan, there is no need for these powerful groups to spend time even on Council committees, let alone spend time in the Council chamber. But when the time comes to implement Council policy, then, they exert their real power. (See the article on the Melbourne Strategy Plan in this Ecoso Newsletter.)

"The Third Wave"

Abe David and Ted Wheelwright have demystified economics in their book "The Third Wave; Australian and Asian Capitalism" (published by the Left Book Club, Box 282 Sutherland 2232).

It is an easy to read book. This may be partly due to the whimsical illustrations and the boxed quotes but it is very much due to the fact that it is dealing with the day to day problems which we are facing.

An additional feature of the publication is the 16 tables, the concise factual material in the appendices, the list of abbreviations, as well as a very efficient glossary, references and index.

A particularly important appendix is a thirteen page analysis of Trade Unions in Asia. These features make it a book to browse through, then to read most of it thoroughly and, after this, to find out how to use it as a reference book.

Australian Real Estate

The book is about foreign ownership and indebtedness. It points out that for the past two hundred years Australian economy has been dominated by Britain, then, more recently, the United States have entered our economy, now changes are taking place through investment from Japan and other rising capitalist nations of Asia.

The introduction states "New forms of imperialism are the modern-day reality; these forms are more economic, financial and cultural than they are overtly political."

On page 64 of the book there is this quote from the Hong Kong press:-

"You don't have to live in Australia to invest in Australian Real Estate. The Commonwealth Bank, Australia's leading bank is able to provide Hong Kong dollars finance to assist non-residents of Australia with the purchase of either commercial or residential real estate in Australia."

Read Our Book and Unite !

"The Third Wave" was launched in November, 1989, and several of the launchings were on building sites.

Abe David, one of the authors, is a trade unionist who has worked as a rigger. In Sydney he and his co-author, Professor Wheelwright, spoke at the World Square multi-tower development of the Malaysian/Chinese firm Ipha Garden which is on-sold to several big Japanese corporations.

In Melbourne Ted Wheelwright and Abe David spoke at the Melbourne Central, a development over the Museum Station 80 % owned by Japanese construction firm Kumagai Gumi.

David Abe said to the building workers "We cannot avoid being involved in the development of Asia, but workers should have as much say about that as capitalists and politicians; workers therefore need to be informed. Make common cause with the unionists of Asia, read our book and unite !"

Equal Partners

The writers are very careful to emphasise that anti-imperialism "does not mean being against ordinary people of the imperialist power. It does, however, mean being opposed to its ruling class."

The book is being simultaneously launched in Japan. In a foreword to the Australian edition, Shigeto Tsuru (Professor of Economics, Meiji Gakuin University, Yokohama, Japan) wrote :-

"I am confident that the progressive forces in Japan will be sympathetically interested in this book, nodding in agreement with many of the critical remarks on the conduct of Japanese capitalism abroad."

So buy the book for \$15 and you can "nod in agreement" too !

The Strategy Plan Saga 1972....1989

This is the story of a never ending effort by community organisation to implement the Melbourne City Council Strategy Plan as told by a member of the North Melbourne Association (NMA).

DATE (Documents Available through Ecoso) has a fairly complete set of documents covering the 18 years since the Strategy plan was first proposed. These documents include many, many reports, prepared collectively by the North Melbourne Association (NMA) and other community organisations as well as official reports.

Dreams of the Early Seventies

Trend planning, based on looking at population growth, increase in car ownership, office space, home size and other such factors, was the basis for all planning in Victoria until 1972 when the Melbourne City Council appointed the "Inter-plan" team to prepare a strategy plan.

The preparation of the strategy plan broke new grounds in three ways.

1. The planners facilitated very wide spread participation during the preparation of the plan. So welcome was this new type of community action that fifty members of the the NMA prepared the Association's own plan, "Citizens Action plan for North and West Melbourne" (the CAN) which has become a basic textbook for the NMA for the past 17 years.

2. Instead of looking at the trends the planners looked at the assets of the city stating :-

"To maintain the assets of - VARIETY, COMPACTNESS, AND ACCESSIBILITY - it is necessary to redirect some of the present trends. The spreading of high density employment mainly in office buildings - away from the points

of greatest accessibility - i.e. the present and future rail stations in the Central Business District (CBD) - is the most basic trend that needs altering."

3. In order to "contain high density employment within a short walking distance of the rail station in the CBD" the planners proposed a completely new type of land use for Victoria. This was stated in the following words :-

"To provide for an area immediately adjacent to the CBD where a mix of uses can economically exist that require the accessibility of the city and which are ancillary to the office uses. Permit higher density residential developments in the area of mixed-use subject to a suitable housing environment being created."

The Key of the Strategy Plan

The Strategy Plan was passed by the Melbourne City Council in 1974. But, the key to the strategy was removed for further consideration. The key is to "redirect the present trends" of the spread of high density employment away from points accessible by public transport and thus the implementation of the proposals for the area of mixed uses in which there is encouragement for housing.

Fifteen years have passed and still the Melbourne City Council Strategy Plan has not implemented as a planning scheme. In the meantime, by default, trend planning continues and office towers sprawl along the boulevards, around Flagstaff Gardens and into South Carlton.

As this Ecoso Newsletter is being prepared the State Government's Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) is hearing the appeals on Amendment RL5, the amendment to the Government Planning Scheme which is aimed at implementing the Strategy Plan. However, large parts of the Municipality, especially the mixed-use areas have been taken out of the plan, so that the key to the plan is still not really being considered.

Housing Targets Scrapped

In 1987 the North Melbourne Association prepared a report warning on "the astounding turn of events in the implementation of the multi-use areas strategy". It examined the housing strategies of the State Government and the City of Melbourne.

This report was written when the Ministry of Planning and Environment refused to exhibit the amendment to implement the updated Melbourne City Council Strategy plan. The facts in this report are currently very relevant as the present AAT hearings may finish the "scrapping".

The Association's report gives details of the various attempts by the Planning Department of Council and the State Governments to ignore the 1973 strategy of density incentives for dwelling units in mixed use redevelopments and attempts made to increase non-residential permitted densities (e.g. Mixed Use Area Study 1975, Mixed Use Area Study 1976, proposed Amendment 96 to Metropolitan Melbourne Planning Scheme 1978/79 and other attempts....these reports are available in D.A.t.E.).

At a critical stage, April 1976, peak professional and community organisations combined to counter these attempts. Unity was achieved across a number of organisation and a common document was signed by the following organisations - the Combined City of Melbourne Associations, (with 5 resident and 1 business associations); the Town and Country Association, the Royal Aust. Inst. of Architects, the Royal Aust. Inst. of Planners and the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce; and representatives of these groups joined in common deputations to Government and Council.

Such unity resulted in stopping amendments to the Planning Scheme which would have shelved the Strategy... the community effort had succeeded, at that stage, in preserving the original plan.

The 1980 sacking of the Melbourne City Council, on trumped up charges of corruption, was partly an attempt to create an atmosphere where the fringe residential wards could be severed from the Central Activities District and thus reduce the influence of the urban action movements for the implementation of the Strategy plan.

There is no room in Ecoso to give the full saga but those readers interested in the details of the campaigns around the Strategy Plan from 1972 to 1989 are welcome to study the D.A.T.E. documents which include the official reports, community reports and much much more.

In the meantime the hearings of Amendment RL5 are continuing and more information on this may be reported later.

Hints on Community Development

On page 1 of Ecoso 2/6 there was an article called "Three Constraints, (Paradoxes) of Collectives". Some readers may find it helpful to refer back to this article before reading on about its practical application.

A short while ago Ruth Crow gave a talk on "Recruiting and Keeping Members" to a seminar organised by the District Health Councils (DHC) in Victoria.

The paper given at this seminar is reproduced in this Ecoso Newsletter. The ideas apply to community organisations generally.

She introduced the talk with a discussion on the three constraints which were the contradictions between :-

1. Initiators and Newcomers,
2. Funding Projects and the Involvement of Unpaid People
3. Parochialism and the Wider Community.

1. Initiators and Newcomers (The constituency)

The population can be regarded as consisting of interpenetrating social worlds, the components of which can be identified in such groupings as children, youth, elderly people, white-collar workers, industrial workers, employers, farmers, tenants, home-owners, people with special need, members of service organisations, migrants students and many others.

In identifying a constituency it is possible to distinguish a number of stages in ascending possibility of involvement towards a group of about seventeen people which forms the core group of the organisation.

There is no hard and fast line between the various stages. The ability of an organisation to continually renew itself (through individuals and groups moving from one stage of involvement to another) depends on fostering the ideals of the particular organisation. Thus the aims and objects of the organisation need to be continuously and creatively popularised, and at the same time, adapted to changing needs of society.

Constituencies in Concentric Circles... ascending possibility of involvement.

1.1 300 - 500 people who think they are, could be, were are maybe members of an organisation.

There needs to be some way of keeping in touch with these people at least once a year; for example, sending them the annual report and an invitation to at least one gathering.

1.2 150 - 300 people who are actually members, (feel that they are members) i.e. have paid a subscription, or in some way made a commitment.

There needs to be some way of keeping in touch with these people three or four times a year, for example through a newsletter or through invitations to several gatherings.

1.3 80 - 150 people who are prepared to actually do something (will occasionally respond to a request for assistance) so long as they are not "put out".

This grouping is a pool of people who can be asked to deliver leaflets, come to a meeting (or send an apology) let other people know about meetings, and occasionally contribute their special skills (typing, publicity, public speaking etc).

A newsletter can be used to keep in touch with these people and in addition special consideration needs to be given to inviting them to gatherings in which they may be particularly interested.

It is very important to recognise the great variety of skills in such a group, and to ask people to contribute their particular skill rather than make general appeals for help.

1.4 0 - 60 people who are prepared "to put themselves out", occasionally, but not regularly to help the organisation.

People in this group are likely to have an abiding commitment to some particular issue and are probably quite heavily involved in another organisation.

This group of people has the greatest cross-fertilising potential.

A creative way of using a newsletter, for example, can result in encouraging closer links between the organisations... for example publishing (or republishing) articles from another organisation; holding joint campaigns; in general giving mutual support and forming coalitions for short periods of time over specific issues.

1.5 17 - 40 people who are prepared to give some priority to the effective functioning of the organisation.

These people are very conscious of the aims and objects of the organisation, although some may not have actually studied them. They think about the organisation and how it should function.

Constant attention needs to be given to involving people in this grouping in the practical organisational life through sub-committee, invitations to "open meetings"; request for help for specific periods of time and so on (note emphasis on specific periods).

1.6 6 - 17 people with an abiding interest. This is the reliable core and includes those who are prepared to accept responsibilities requested of them either through election or through a collective decision.

It is important to recognise that some people in this group may be only able to give an intermitten commitment. To cater for this ad hoc as well as permanent sub-groups need to be the form of organisation developed for the day to day carrying out of policies.

2. Funded Projects and the Involvement of Unpaid Workers

The prevailing values of our society (privatism, acquisitiveness and competition) not only limit the ability of people to work collectively, but continually penetrate the collectives that do come into existence.

How can an organisations develop a spirit of each contributing, some with one kind of skill, others with different skills, but all with a quickenning appreciation of each other?

How can we replace mercenary relationships with mutual regard?

Collectives Involving Paid and Unpaid Workers.....the process of creating community involvement.

2.1 The problem of not being able to measure success can be partly tackled by having forward planning around "happenings", forums, excursions, information days, and so on. Such "happenings" need to be planned so that the future is brought into the present, not only in the ideas presented, but also in the relationships developed before, during and after the happening.

2.2 The problem of "burn out" can partly be tackled through organising around short term "happenings" so that those involved know there is an end to their commitment. (see 1.5 above).

2.3 The problem of renewing interest (or renewing membership) can partly be tackled through sowing the seeds of the new "happening" in the development of the one that is being carried out.

2.4 The problem of isolation can partly be tackled by including in the "happenings" some opportunities for cultural and social development, not necessarily only on the issues to which the organisation is committed.

2.5 The problem of "being snowed under" can be partly tackled by involving other people in organisational matters between gatherings. The time between meetings is of crucial importance.

2.6 The problem of developing a team spirit depends partly on the opportunity for participants to express their value judgments, or to relate these to the aims and objects of the organisation. Thus discussion on how the organisation is functioning can help members appreciate each other's standpoint.

2.7 The problem of how to act on a key issue can be partly tackled by ensuring that at all meetings there is as much time as possible for discussion on policy.

Thus creatively planning agendas is very important. The main meeting time is best devoted to policy discussions and the detailed delegation of responsibilities is best arranged outside the meeting time.

3. Parochialism and the Wider Community

The words "local community" may convey the idea of a romanticised concept of a harmonious, benevolent, homogeneous group. However, the concept has the opposite meaning of a "social mix". In its essence, local community is not a grouping of like-minded people, but a grouping of people irrespective of their differences. Taking action over a matter that affects them does not obliterate the differences in life-style or differences in standpoints of individuals.

Whether an organisation be based on community of interest or community of locality it has the continual responsibility of finding ways of enabling participants to leave behind their initial parochialism.

To overcome parochialism it is crucial to continually be working out how the particular organisation relates to other organisations. Thus a thorough knowledge of the aims and objects of organisations (working closely together) needs to be developed so that relationships between them becomes alive.

Community Development is a Process.....Continuously finding starting points and links.

3.1 Plan for a variety of starting points for possible new efforts which could arise from current effort.

3.2 Finding ways of assisting supporters to take part in projects (happenings) other than those based on the organisation of main commitment.

3.3 Encouraging supporters (members) to have a sense of belonging to the whole district as well as being interested in the area where they work or live.

3.4 Encourage self-help education (personal development) as well as opportunities for participation in social groups.

3.5 Creative agendas (see point 2.7 above).

3.6 Develop an appreciation of aims and objects (see 2.6 above)

3.7 Occasionally have some all out effort around some project which involves as many members and supporters as possible in the preparation of the event. Remembering that the preparation is often as important as the event for the personal and social development of people involved.

The above report then concluded with some detailed information for District Health Councils.

In December 1989 discussions were held to prepare a "Women's Policy" for the New Left Party. The draft policy, prepared in Adelaide stated "The NLP will aim to ensure that women are not exploited as volunteers, and are appropriately paid and recognised for their labour.

Here are some ideas which are trying to "tease out" the relationship between the social and economic worth of volunteerism.

Volunteerism and Women New Left Party

A suggested section for NLP Draft Policy on Women :-

The NLP recognises that women contribute as volunteers - free labour - in the community and the workforce.

In our patriarchal society voluntary work for women is expected and accepted and therefore, it is as invisible as housework.

While recognising the exploitative nature of such unpaid work, it needs also to be recognised that such voluntary work provides, for many people, social involvement which is denied them because of the life style they are living.



Cartoon from "The Third Wave"
See Review in this Ecoso Newsletter

To defend their rights and interests, and the interests of those for whom they are responsible, women have created a great variety of voluntary organisations some of which have checked bureauacracy and the abuse of power, and at the same time, continually campaigned for more appropriate types of human services. In our society there is constant pressure to divert such efforts and thus limit women's volunteerism to trivial, mundane matters.

The NLP aims for a society which recognises the social and economic worth of volunteerism.

Thus there are two aspects to be considered; the social and the economic. Payment for some of the work of volunteers meets the economic aspect. Work that reduces or replaces work by a paid work force should be remunerated.

To meet the social aspect the NLP will aim to ensure that those who choose to do voluntary work are involved in the collective management of the service, and are mainly contributing in unique, personal ways which could not be made by those in the paid work force.

Furthermore, the NLP aims for a society where voluntary organisations supplement and reinforce the institutions of self-management and socialist democracy, recognising that this activity is essential for the moral and cultural transformation of society and that from these experiences new forms of democracy could develop.

Some useful ideas on voluntary organisations are expressed in this statement from "Towards Socialism in Australia"; Program of the Communist Party of Australia, adopted 1979 :-

"To defend their interests under capitalism, Australian people have created a great variety of voluntary organisations, such as trade unions, women's prganisations tenants associations etc. A socialist Australia would make constitutional provision for democratic initiatives by such groups as a check on bureaucracy and the abuse of power.

"Voluntary organisations would supplement and reinforce the institutions of self-management and socialist democracy. Their activity would be essential for the moral and cultural transformation of society. Out of their experience new forms of democracy could develop."

Some of the phrases from this have been used in the above suggestions for the section on Volunteerism.

Subscription to Ecoso

Subscription to Ecoso Newsletter are now due (\$10 for 6 newsletters).

Name.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Telephone number.....Send to :-
RUTH CROW
E2-5, 89 O'Shanassy Street
North Melbourne, Vic. 3051
Phone: 328 2345

All past subscribers should have received the first 8 Ecosos. If you have not please circle the number of those missing from your file.

New subscribers can purchase past newsletters for \$1.50 each (includes postage). An index for Ecoso Newsletters 2/1 to 2/8 is enclosed.

Circle the Ecoso you need 2/1, 2/2, 2/3, 2/4, 2/5, 2/6, 2/7, 2/8.