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ECOSO EXCHANGE NEWSLETTER

No 2/9, March 1990

ISSN 1033 9205

Special Issue of Ecoso Exchange

to

Celebrate International Women's Day



Marjorie Nunan, founder and first President of the Combined Pensioners' Association of Victoria and co-founder of the Australian Commonwealth Pensioners' Federation. Vale 2th. January, 1963.

This newsletter includes five pen-portraits

of

Women in "The Times of the True Believers"

These are :-

Alisa O'Connor, Marjory Nunan, Margaret Walker, Ruth Crow and Doris McRae

ECOSO EXCHANGE NEWSLETTER
and
D.A.T.E.
Documents Available Through Ecoso

Ecoso Exchange was a newsletter published from 1967 to 1979. It is now being revived as a bi-monthly publication. It is aimed at being avowedly left on urban issues and it especially reports on neighbourhood issues and local government.

Although based in Melbourne Ecoso has a number of supporters in other states. Some of these send Ecoso material about urban issues in their state, thus some of the Ecoso articles are based on information about neighbourhood and local government campaigns in other places.

D.A.T.E. (Documents Available Through Ecoso) is a service to Ecoso subscribers giving them access to documents Maurie and Ruth Crow have collected since the 1940s. The documents are being listed in a computerised data bank.

The revived Ecoso Newsletter is using the Ecoso Guidelines which were used by the previous publication and in addition it is also using the value judgements stated in "Make Melbourne Marvellous" which was published by the Victorian Branch of the Communist Party of Australia in 1985. (see over page)

Ecoso Exchange Newsletter is Now Being Revived

- 1) To provide information... Australia-wide ...to the various groups and individuals in the ecology (sustainable society) movements.
- 2) To encourage the development of links between the trade union movement and the ecology movement.
- 3) To help unite the progressive political movements through the development of a New Party of the Left.
- 4) To find common ground on some issues between the left political parties and the newly emerging movements such as the Rainbow Alliance.
- 5) To make documents available to people in the radical ecology movement through the DATE Collection.

To Subscribe to Ecoso Exchange Please Fill in This Form

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Enclose \$10 and send to :-

Ruth Crow
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March 8th is celebrated throughout the world as International Women's Day therefore all articles in this Ecoso are about women.

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Women's Place

The preparation of the 1990 Women Charter has revived interest in the Women's Charter movement during the 1940s.

To set the stage for Ecoso readers here is a quote from Winifred Holtby which was published in the introduction to the 1943 Women's Charter. The quote is introduced with the following words. "The most telling answer to the stock argument that 'women's place is in the home' is that of Winifred Holtby :-

"Women are praised for the maternal instinct which makes the care expended on their own children natural and pleasant; they are criticised for the political activities which result in the safeguarding of other people's children as well as their own. So slums remain uncleared, milk is wasted, nursery schools are exceptional luxuries, educational reforms are delayed, while 'good wives and mother' shut themselves up in the comfort of their private lives and earn the approval of unthinking society."

Women's Charters

Prepared in 1939, 1943 and 1990

In this Ecoso Newsletter we give readers an opportunity of reading about three efforts at preparing programmes on women's needs.

1. Information about the updating of "The Women's Charter" which, at present, is initiating a movement for women to plan during the 1990s for the twenty-first century.

2. 1943. Two pages from "The Women's Charter" with its post-war plans for women.

3. 1939. Recommendations from "Working class Wives" (a classic account of women's lives in England in the 1930s).

Updating the Women's Charter

For the past six months in Melbourne a group of women have been preparing a Women's Charter in an attempt to "bring the fragments of the women's movement together".

Some of the older women at these planning meetings remembered the series of Women's Charter Conferences which were held, in all large Australian towns, during the 1940s to work out ideas for a better life for women in the post-war years. They also knew about the Charter movements in England and United States.

In Australia this movement was initiated by Jessie Street, Katharine Pritchard and Mary Gilmore, in America by Eleanor Roosevelt, while in England Eleanor Wilkinson and Dame Sybil Thorndike were the patrons of the Charter movement.

Melbourne Women's Summit

In October last year at a Women's Summit, held in Melbourne, it was decided to prepare a Women's Charter that could be used to plan for the year 2000 and beyond.

While there is much to learn from the past, there can be no harking back. Women today face some different problems and have to face the older problems in a different way.

For example, at the 1989 Summit, the discussion on housing included ideas on social and physical safety of homes and neighbourhoods, designing housing and the meaning of housing (see Ecso 2/7, page 2 for an extract from the housing report to the Summit).

The 1943 Charter did not deal with these issues as it was mainly concerned with equity and economic issues as regards housing.

In addition, since the 1940s, some words used to describe issues affecting women have partly changed their meaning and new phrases have been created to more accurately describe today's relationships; for example, "an ecologically sustainable society"; the "new public health"; "consumerism"; "collectives" and so on.

The Charter group recognised that women are playing a significant role in the creative process of developing a more colourful and accurate language and that inevitably the Charter document would contain words and phrases which may not yet be in common use. Therefore, a glossary is included in the document (which will be added to as the Charter is redrafted). It is hoped that this information on words will not only help women to understand the Charter proposals but to have a deeper understanding of gender issues generally.

Stage 1, The Quest... Not a Final Document

The Charter is based on ideas from the talks and discussion at the October Women's Summit but includes material from other sources as well.

The first draft was written by Ruth Crow and the whole document was circulated for comment to more than 30 women, another 20 women were asked to have a look at specific pages. Illustrations are by Mary Hammond.

The 1990 Charter is similar in layout to the documents of the 1940s in that it deals with a number of separate issues, setting each one out in a separate section with some introductory ideas; but from there on it is different.

In the 1940s the Women's Charter made very specific recommendations. but this 1990 Charter asks questions, challenging the reader to think about what are the solutions to the issues raised.

It is called "Updating the Women's Charter, Stage 1: The Quest" to indicate that it is not a final document and that during the 1990s women will be involved in a quest to develop and apply the ideas in the Charter.

Economic and Technolqical Issues

The introduction to the Charter calls on women to discuss the ideas in the document and add ideas on issues which have not been addressed at this stage.

The introduction states :-

"We emphasise our need for your ideas. With the material at hand we were only able to cope with presenting some ideas on the social changes that are taking place. We did not have enough resources and time to deal with the economic and technological changes. This absence of input on these crucial issues emphasises the trend for women's participation in society to be marginalised in less powerful spheres of activity.

"Through discussions on this Charter and through updating it frequently, we hope to provide continual opportunities, during the next ten years, for women to collectively contribute to planning for the twenty first century. It is important, during this period, to give much more attention to finding the connection between social, economic and technological issues."

Stage 2

The launching of Stage 1 of "Updating the Women's Charter" on March 7th will initiate the preparation of Stage 2.

Discussions will be held during 1990 and a Stage 2 supplement will be available early next year.

Ideas are needed on women and child abuse, defacto relationships, divorce, economics, education, home businesses, houseowrk, law, parliamentary representation, political parties, prostitution, sexual harrassment, sexuality, technology, unemployemnyt and the special needs of migrant women, first generation women, young women, middle aged women, older women and many more.

During stage 2 a meeting of women will be held to work out the value judgements for the Charter.

If you can help please send in your ideas to the Union of Australian women (address below).

Although the Charter has been written by women in Victoria the issues affect women all over Australia. It is hoped that women in other states will find the document useful in planning for the future.

The Union of Australian Women

The Union of Australian Women will be celebrating its fortieth birthday this year.

A history of the Victorian Section of the UAW is at present being prepared.

Ailsa O'Connor was the first Victorian secretary of the UAW. You can read about Ailsa on the next page of this Newsletter.

WOMEN'S CHARTER OF AUSTRALIA

WHEREAS the indispensable contribution that women make to all phases of human life is at present inadequately recognised; and

WHEREAS they are still submitted to many discriminations and limitations imposed on account of their sex, and are not accorded the same status, opportunities, responsibilities and rewards as are accorded to men in the community; and

WHEREAS it has been shown to be necessary to develop the capabilities of women and to utilise the resources of woman-power in order to achieve Victory in War;

WE BELIEVE that it will be equally necessary to continue the development and utilise the potential capacity of women in the post-war period in order to achieve a lasting Victory in Peace.

This Australian Women's Conference for Victory in War and Victory in Peace affirms the need for the application of the principle of equality for women and adopts the following platform for the establishment of this principle.

ROLE OF WOMAN

AS CITIZEN

WE BELIEVE no discrimination should be made in respect of the responsibilities and rights of men and women as citizens; that women should be eligible for appointment and to qualify to hold any position; that they should be given the opportunity to hold public office and to take an effective part in the work of all administrative and legislative bodies.

AS MOTHER AND/OR HOMEMAKER

WE BELIEVE the indispensable service rendered to the community by mothers, accompanied as it is by inevitable and specific handicaps and responsibilities, demands special consideration and provision;

WE FURTHER BELIEVE that dependent economic status denies liberty and opportunity and justice to the individual, and economic independence strengthens character and develops a greater sense of responsibility.

WE RECOMMEND—

(a) that the mother and/or home-maker be remunerated for her work in the home by a personal endowment of a minimum of 30/- a week, operated on the same principle as child endowment;

(b) that the existing system of child endowment should apply to all dependent children in a family and be increased to an adequate sum.

AS WAGE-EARNER

WE BELIEVE that the standard of living of the whole community is threatened, and animosity between men and women wage-earners is engendered by cheap female labour within the community;

WE FURTHER BELIEVE that experience has shown that whenever women have been given the opportunity to do work previously performed by men they have done it as well;

WE THEREFORE BELIEVE that there should be equal

AS VOLUNTARY WORKER

As much of the social improvement and the origin and development of social services is owing to the foresight and faithful and tireless efforts of voluntary workers; and

As a spirit of fellowship and co-operation which is so essential to progress is fostered by the common interest and common efforts of persons working together;

WE RECOMMEND that—

(a) voluntary workers should receive honourable status and recognition for their services to the community;

(b) provision should be made to give ample scope to the initiative and energies of voluntary workers to take a full part in the great work of reconstruction that must follow the war;

(c) steps should be taken to preserve existing associations of voluntary workers when the war is ended, and to divert the great flood of voluntary work at present being performed by men and women for Victory in War, into channels to help the nation achieve Victory in Peace.

AS MEMBER OF THE SERVICES

As special provision is made for the wives, children and other dependents of men in the Services,

WE REQUEST that—

(a) the women in the Services, including the Nursing Service, be granted the same status, pay, dependents' allowances and other benefits and opportunities afforded to men in the Services of equivalent rank;

(b) that Servicewomen under 21 years of age be granted the same pay and status as Servicemen under 21 years of age.

AS PROFESSIONAL WORKER

Wherever women have been admitted to professional spheres, they have proved themselves capable of measuring up to the established standards.

WE BELIEVE that there should be no discrimination of sex limiting the opportunities for women to professional appointments, and that they should enjoy equal pay, equal status and equal opportunities with men in all professional appointments.

AS PUBLIC SERVANT

WE BELIEVE that women suffer many injustices in the Public Service. Not only are they paid at a lower rate, but they are frequently employed for long and indefinite periods as temporary employees, and are thereby deprived of pension rights and other benefits.

WE THEREFORE BELIEVE that women in the Public Service should have equal pay, equal status and equal opportunity with men.

IN PUBLIC LIFE

WE BELIEVE that women have a special contribution to make in public life, as citizens of a democratic community.

WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND that every encouragement should be given to women to stand as candidates for all elected legislative bodies, and that they should be appointed in adequate numbers to national and international conferences, diplomatic posts, to administrative positions of authority and responsibility, and on boards, commissions, etc., in order that

Extract from Women's Charter 1943

Available from D.A.T.E.

Extract from "Working Class Wives"
by Margery Spring Rice
1939

Available from D.A.T.E.

These then are the recommendations which the Women's Health Enquiry Committee confidently put forward as practical remedies for the unhappy state of affairs shown in the investigation of these 1,250 families. There does not appear to the Committee to be anything revolutionary, visionary, extravagant or socially unsound about them. Family life will be strengthened by the increased self-respect which such reforms should bring to the mother. That the country is rich enough to pay for these improvements, even the most expensive of them, cannot be denied. Indeed they are based upon the soundest economy, for it is certain that one of the earliest results of so great an increase in well-being and happiness as they would bring, would be an incalculable saving of expenditure in the cure of disease and the tinkering with destitution. The Committee are confident also of the political soundness of such reforms. Whatever social and economic changes the future may bring, the principle of democratic development of individual happiness and welfare through communal services offered to every citizen, will always be an integral part of wise government.

It is realised that these recommendations only go part of the way towards the planning of the ideal democratic state; but it is hoped that at least they will turn the tide of human erosion where it flows strongest and deepest, by giving freedom and honour to those who perform the most indispensable labour of the world.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

THE three main causes of the married working woman's difficulties are poverty, ill-health and ignorance.

1. To mitigate Poverty, we recommend:—

- a. The raising of wages by an extension of the machinery of Trades Boards and of collective bargaining.
- b. Increased communal provision for children by:—
 - i. An extension of the social services affecting children.
 - ii. A system of Family Allowances paid to the mother.
- c. The provision of appropriate subsidies for housing such as eventually to make it possible for every family to have a healthy home at a rent which it can afford.

2. To mitigate Ill-health, we recommend:—

- a. The development and improvement of the existing maternal health services of Local Authorities, and the establishment of gynæcological clinics to deal with all aspects of a woman's physical and psychological life.
- b. The extension of the National Health Insurance system to cover the wives and dependent children of insured men.
- c. The establishment of women's clubs for recreation, holidays and leisure.
- d. The concentration of agricultural subsidies, if any, on protective food-stuffs, so as to bring these within the means of every working-class home.

3. To mitigate Ignorance, we recommend that increased facilities both in Welfare Centres and through Local Education Authorities should be given to young women, especially to those about to marry or who have been recently married, in the care of the home and of the health and hygiene of the family.

Women in the Times of the True Believers

The recent TV serial on Channel 2, "The True Believers", was about how the Cold War was fought by men in the parliaments and the courts.

The following five articles are about how the Cold War was fought by women in their homes, streets, and neighbourhoods.

Here are pen portraits of five women who pioneered new forms of political action during the "Times of the True Believers" (that is in the late 1940s and early 1950s).

The women are Ailsa O'Connor, Marjorie Nunan, Margaret Walker, myself (Ruth Crow) and Doris McRae.

Ailsa O'Connor (1921 - 1980)

"If you think, if you feel, if then you act you must succeed."
Words written in Ailsa's diary.

How Ailsa would have loved to have seen the Exhibition of the German Expressionists which recently visited Melbourne. She frequently spoke about how she was influenced by the "vibrant impact" of the exhibition of the Great Masters which was held in Melbourne in 1939.

Ailsa was a great admirer of German realist artist Kathe Kollowitz (1867 - 1945) whom she described as "perhaps the greatest women artist in history". Ailsa learnt a great deal about Kathe from her friend Tina Wentcher (1887 - 1974).

At Tina's funeral she said "For me Tina formed a direct link with vital sources of the art stream with which I and others here long before identified in the art of European humanism, of German expressionism." (Tina Wentcher lived in Australia from about 1940. A number of her small sculptures are on display at the McClelland Gallery near Mornington).

After Ailsa died her friends published a collection of her articles and talk-notes with the result that "Unfinished Work" (published by Greenhouse, 1982) is a gold mine for all concerned with issues of art, women, politics and children.

The following information is mainly based on material in "Unfinished Work" (page numbers refer to that book) but it is supplemented by my own personal experiences as one of Ailsa's friend.

Throughout her life Ailsa was caught up in a support role. On page 27 we can read how, as a young wife, mother and politically active person she "began to feel a loss of identity as an artist, though I had commenced marriage with a feeling of equal potential. Vitality drops with child rearing, we were poor, but it was more than that, I felt I needed some creative sphere I could enter into privately...."

Then she explains "I tried to bring cultural methods of work into the organisations that were focussing on women in the homes and factories."

Despite her desire to be an artist, during the Cold War, Ailsa became the first Hon. Sec. of the Union of Australian Women. This organisation was established, as an alternative to the Housewives Association, at the beginning of 1950, when that organisation expelled women who it thought may be members of the Communist Party.

While she was pioneering this way of working amongst women Ailsa also helped to initiate new types of activities around the cultural up-bringing of children. She was concerned about the effect of the cold War on children and so she used her artistic talents to organise activities for children which gave them a confidence in the future and a love of peace.

Ailsa in Melbourne and others such as Madeliene Kempster (in Sydney) opened out learning opportunities for children through art exhibitions and collections of children's writings and so on.

Ten pages in "Unfinished Work" (208 -219) are about an exhibition of children's art Ailsa organised in Melbourne in 1953. It was on the theme of peace and friendship and exhibited children's art, sent especially for this exhibition, from ten Asian countries, including Japan, China, Burma, India, Malaya, and from children in fifty Australian schools.

Ailsa wrote that one of the aims of the Art Exchange was "to offer creative alternatives to the corrupting influences at work on the minds of children, spreading racist ideas as a preparation for war."

She describes how "We found that artistic expression at any level is a language that surmounts national barriers, and it is just such a language that people, need today. The mothers are aware of this and warmly respond to any opportunity to study what other children are doing, and the children themselves are in deep need of such experiences, their interest surprising even their parents and teachers."

To organise the exhibition Ailsa formed "a new organisation with representatives from art teachers, wives of artists, local women's organisations and others." (209)

Younger Ecoso readers may need to note that all this happened almost thirty years ago when there were very few people from Asia living in Australia, when such liberating ideas as exhibitions of children's art were unheard of and when there were very few trained art teachers.

In 1975, in a speech at Melbourne University on "What has happened to women artists - a personal view", Ailsa described her adult life and then said "During all this time - about thirty years - I never ceased to plan some day to be fully involved in art. The question was how and when." (27)

In the introduction to "Unfinished Work" Julie Copeland writes :- "She (Ailsa) believed her involvement over thirty years in the struggle of the Left, the art world and the women's movement all came together towards the end of her life, but she also believed that the struggle is a continuous one." (8)

On page 235 there is a list of Ailsa's sculptures on public display in Melbourne parks and gardens. One very evocative sculpture is a statue of Mary Gilbert in the conservatory of the Fitzroy Gardens. Mary Gilbert is believed to be the first white woman to give birth in Victoria.

Ailsa's sculptures and painting have been bought by banks and schools, and of course, by her many admirers. But much of her movingly beautiful banners for peace and for women's demonstration, her drawings on leaflets and so on had only a temporary life.

When she was dying Ailsa requested that I (Ruth Crow) should be the only speaker at her funeral.

I spoke about how Ailsa had "a many sided life.... a profound sense of oneness... and because people themselves are infinitely different she contributed to a great variety of movements ranging from action on world peace to action on a more intimate daily scale ... housing, traffic, prices and living standards in general.

I quoted an article written by Ailsa :- "Socialism without women is a caricature. Socialist programmes must recognise feminism is an expression of the consciousness of an enormous sector of the oppressed... until women move strongly into arts and politics, research and science, we cannot make such an important social change."

Marjory Nunan (1916 c - 1963)

"I won't eat my carrots. I don't want to be big and strong.

I want to be like Marje !"

(From 8 year old June Crow in 1948)

The daily papers called Marjory Nunan "Magnificent Marje" when she lead the pensioners cavalcades to Canberra during the 1950s.

From birth Marje suffered from some very painful and obvious disabilities. In a memorial article to Marje in the "Combined Pensioners News" in 1969 Edith McLennan wrote :- "When I first met Marje I was appalled at her suffering and amazed at her courage in the fight for the under-privileged people in the community."

In the "Times of the True Believers" Marje lived in Brunswick. One of her main social pleasures in life was to go to the fortnightly gathering of the Brunswick Pensioners Social Club.

In those days all pensioners collected their pension in cash from the post office. In Brunswick on pension day the pensioners would go to the Oddfellows Hall for community singing and other social activities.

Every year the Brunswick Council allowed the Pensioners Club to have the use of the Town Hall rent-free for their Christmas Party.

In the early fifties, when Marje wrote asking for the use of the Hall, the Council refused the request on the grounds that it thought Marje was a communist.

The Mayor, Cr Johnston, (at that time an ALP member but later, when the DLP was formed, he joined it) invited pensioners to join a new pensioners organisation (for a very low subscription) which would provide its members with a free Christmas dinner.

Marje was devastated, but she soon recovered her spirits when she and her friends (Mabel Elliott, Maurie Crow, Ruth Crow and other Brunswick Communist Party members of the period) worked out a two pronged answer.

Firstly, Marje encouraged all members of the original social club to join the Mayor's new organisation. On the day of the party, just when Mayor Johnston was about to make his formal speech of welcome, who should arrive but diminutive Marje ! As she entered the hall the pensioners gave her a standing ovation !

As Edith McLennan states (in the article quoted above) "She saw the conceit of pretentious people and made fun of it, but never maliciously."

Secondly, up to this time the Brunswick pensioners' group had mainly been a social club and had not involved the pensioners in any direct political campaigns. Well, if Marje was being called a communist, it was timely for her to politically campaign on the needs of pensioners. She therefore raised the slogan of "Half the Basic Wage for Pensioners". This became a rallying cry to pensioners all over Australia who joined the annual Pensioners' Cavalcades to Canberra at budget time year after year from then on.

Ecoso readers can find out more about Marje the Magnificent and this historic campaign in the mid-August daily papers of the nineteen fifties.

A tribute to Marje from Australian author, Alan Marshall

"I always parted from her strengthened and inspired. She made me feel a better man. I felt in her a tremendous ability 'to give out', to bestow some of her strength on others.

"I never felt sorry for her. Such feelings towards her would have been an insult. She had no need of pity. I envied her the great success she made of life, the great character she had developed in the battles she had waged."

Margaret Walker OAM (1921)

"Where can a black girl sit on a merry-go-round ?"
 (From a poem by Negro Poet Langston Hughes)

A few years ago Margaret Walker was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for her contribution to dance throughout Australia. She is at present living in Canberra where she is very much involved with the Australian Association of Dance Education.

During the early forties she was a dancer in the Boravansky Ballet Company.

In "The Times of the True Believers" Margaret Walker lived in Melbourne. Her opposition to the Cold War was through her dancing in which she promoted peace and international friendship, a love of life and respect for work.

She formed the Unity Dance Group and began to teach innovative dancing, which combined ballet, creative and folk dancing.

A central feature of the Group was that dancing was not just a performance art. The children and adults who learnt to dance from Margaret also learnt to help the audience to participate in dancing.

The Group was also innovative in the way the dancers were taught to perform for audiences of various sizes and in various venues. For example dancing on makeshift outdoor stages at rallies, garden parties and picnics, or in well appointed halls and theatres presenting a full dance program, or as part of a joint theatre production, or out on asphalt at street meetings and factory gate meetings.

A third way the Group was innovative was in its very strong connections with some of the trade unions (for example the Waterside Workers Union, the Building Workers Industrial Union, the Butchers' Union and the Miners' Federation).

The dancers made up ballets based on work movements which were performed on various occasions including union gatherings. The unions helped the group through publicity and some provided venues for the children's dance classes.

Early in 1950 Margaret asked the children to bring a poem or a story which could be made into a ballet. One ten year old, prompted by Ailsa O'Connor, brought a poem by Langston Hughes.

The poem told of the negro child's confusion when she wanted a ride on a merry-go-round but could not find the end seats which could be used by a black child.

The children (and Margaret) made up an evocative dance based on children's party games. The white children (dressed in pastel-shaded dirndles) kept pushing the little black girl (dressed in gaudy check) to the back of the line games (for example in leap frog and oranges and lemons).

Space does not permit a full description of the dance, but the ballet ends with the white children appreciating the black child's compassion and not only allowing her to join the games, but making her the leader of the line or the central person in the ring.

I have seen tears in the eyes of waterside workers when the children danced "The Little Black Girl" at a lunch time wharf gathering.

Later in 1950, when Margaret and the adult members of the Unity Dance Group went to the Berlin Festival they took the ballet "The Little Black Girl" as a gift from Australian children to the World Festival.

On the way to Berlin, at a stop-over in India, the dancers performed "The Little Black Girl" before an audience of thousands. The audience was so enthusiastic about the dance (and its message) that they carried the Australian dancers shoulder-high from the outdoor stage.

At the Festival the dance won the main prize for dance performance.

"The Little Black Girl" is still used by some of Margaret's pupils in their work as teachers in schools, kindergartens and dance schools.

In 1949 Margaret, Audrey Blake and I (Ruth Crow) worked together to plan and establish an organisation for children (aged from 10 to 16). It was called the Junior Eureka League (JEL).

At the risk of being egotistical and sentimental I now want to record a little about my own life in "The Times of the True Believers". In the process I will describe the JEL, including some information about how dancing contributed to the lives of children during those difficult years.

Ruth Crow (1916.....)

"We swear by the southern cross to stand truly by each other".
The part of the Eureka Oath used by J.E.L.

I believe the Cold War started in 1944 when the Australian Government lost the referendum on continuing its wartime powers, the Second Front was opened (with its rush to Berlin) and there was a new agreement between United States and Britian (without the USSR being invited to the talks).

The attacks on the Australian unions (mainly on men in the Left) did not begin until 1949. But in 1948 the attacks on the social services (mainly on women in the Left) was already well advanced. Here are some facts from my own life

Early in 1948 I was elected secretary of the Day Nursery Development Association (DNDA). This organisation was composed of women who had established the wartime children's day care centres and it was campaigning to keep them open.

I represented the DNDA on the Committee of the Victorian Association of Creches (VAC). This charitable-type of organisation was established in the 1890s when the first creches were opened.

In mid 1948 I was asked to go with representatives of the VAC to the State Premier, Mr Dunstan, to ask for more money for improvement of the creches. He refused to receive a deputation while I was on it, because he thought I was a communist.

I think I was one of the first people in Victoria to suffer from this type of discrimination, but I was by no means the last. In the next few months other "communists" (mostly women "local activist") were expelled from School Committees, Mothers Clubs and Prechool Committees.

The community movement is very frail as compared to the unions. Thus the expulsions were felt much more personally than the later attacks on trade unionists.

Communists on the job could rely much more on solidarity but the local activists had to face up to people one by one in their neighbourhoods in isolation.

In addition many of us felt we may have made some mistake, that the expulsion was our own fault. This loss of confidence was not regained easily as there was little interest by the Left in these activities.

The expulsions were very difficult "to take". They meant a tearing apart of the community networks which had been developed over many years. More importantly, to those who had children, it meant that the friendly neighbourhood had suddenly changed its atmosphere to one of hostility.

However, the beginning of the Cold War coincided with a wonderful flowering of cultural activity in the Left. There was the revival of interest in Australian songs, dances and folklore. Added to this was the flowering of the contribution which was being made by European migrants who had come to Australia in the late 1930s.

Audrey, Margaret, I (Ruth Crow) and many others decided that one way of off-setting the worst effects of the Cold War on children was to establish a way of giving the very best of Left culture to the children.

This cultural organisation took the form of the Junior Eureka League. It was closely linked with the Eureka Youth League (EYL) which was very much involved in political campaigns on the needs of young people but it differed from the E.Y.L. in that its activities were confined to culture.

To emphasise this distinction the Eureka oath for JEL members did not include the words "to fight to defend my rights and liberties". The children's words for the oath were limited to "to stand truly by each other". (Australian mateship !)

From 1950 until the mid 1960s there were JEL groups in all capital cities and a number of country towns (Newcastle, Geelong, Bendigo, Wonthaggi and others).

It was an exciting period as we worked out with the children quite new forms of organisation. I tried to capture some of the children's enthusiasms when, in 1952, I wrote the JEL Handbook which was used by the JEL groups throughout Australia.

At this stage it is appropriate to pay a tribute to Maurie Crow. I could provide the know-how of what we did in the JEL but Maurie helped to re-order the handbook in a much more logical and useful form.

The Introduction of the handbook discusses the United Nations "Declaration on Rights of the child". Then follows four sections.

The first section is called "Two Tasks in the Defence of Children". It points out that in the Declaration on the Rights of the Child there is the responsibility for providing the necessities of life, but also the need for "the child to be brought up in the consciousness that its talents will be devoted to the service of its fellow men" (1940's language !).

The second section describes other children's organisation of the period. The third section is the main part of the handbook, dealing with the "three peculiarities" of organising girls and boys in the 10 to 16 age group. These are :-

They are on the threshold of youth, they are in need of adult protection (unobtrusive to girls and boys but obtrusive for parents) and they are at the task of studying (in general, not yet specialising).

The final section describes some practical JEL experiences.

The handbook is called "Tomorrow is a Glorious Day" because it is based on the theory that children need something to look forward to in the not too distant future.

A garbled version of the theories in the handbook is that children need to be actively engaged in bringing the future closer to the present, that in this process children become involved in all sorts of group activities, that the groups keep changing, and that the seeds of the new projects are sown in the current ones.

An Extract from JEL Handbook
"Tomorrow is a Glorious Day"

"How can we gain the children's interest in learning ?

"Should children's leisure hours be taken up with learning ?

"What sort of standard should children be encouraged to achieve ?

"Should dance performers expect other children to be merely spectators ?

"These are some of the queries which naturally arise when classes are being established for children in their out-of-school hours.

"So far experience in this field is very limited, but in its first three years the Unity Dance group has pioneered dance classes for children and many of the experiences of this group can be applied to other art circles and to science and sport in the Junior Eureka League.

"The Unity Dance Group is guided by the principle that "art belongs to the people and must be loved by them. It must be rooted in and grow with their feelings, thoughts and desires."

"Everyone who has seen the "Little Black Girl" ballet will appreciate that the children's dance group is beginning to succeed in using the dance form to express the desires and hopes of the people.

"A feature of the work of the Unity Dance Group which must be applied to all learning situations, is that while maintaining a high standard as regards technical training, it has at the same time avoided limiting its work to the dance classes.

"How this has been achieved can best be illustrated by separating the functions of the dance group into three parts.

"All three parts are interconnected and interdependent but they are described separately in order to make the threefold function of the dance group more easily applied to other groups."

*****This is the end of the handbook extract*****

Here is a summary of the three functions showing how, for children, the mastering of dancing needs to be advanced beyond performing for perfection's sake :-

Firstly, children are taught to perform to large and small audiences for example the children danced before 10,000 people in the Exhibition Buildings at the peace rally attended by the Dean of Canterbury and also danced at cottage gatherings of a dozen or so people.

Secondly, the trained core of child dancers helped other children to join in dancing at gatherings of all sorts and sizes.

Thirdly, through composing their own dances children learnt about the value of ideas in art and brought enjoyment to thousands of people.

An Appeal

The D.A.T.E. (Documents Available Through Ecoso) collection has only a draft copy of "Tomorrow is A Glorious Day".

Is there any person who would like to help to republish "Tomorrow is a Glorious Day" and perhaps update it by adding an introduction or a postscript ?

As well as its historic interest it has some practical information which could be used today to help to organise cultural activities for children. In addition the organisational principles apply to all sorts of organisations.

Today I am constantly aware of applying what I learnt about collectives from the Junior Eureka League members about forty years ago.

If you can help, please phone me, Ruth Crow 03, 328.2345

Doris McRae (1893 - 1988)

"Doris McRae was a woman who knew peace and human rights could be achieved throughout the world. She never ceased to play her part."
(A friend's tribute in the Age)

Doris McRae was one of the first women in Victoria to train as a secondary school teacher.

In "The Times of the True Believers" she had reached the top of her profession both at work and as a unionist.

In the 1940s Doris was one of a handful of Education Department women school principals. She was also vice-president of the Victorian Teachers Union (VTU). She was actively promoting the policies of the VTU Social Questions Committee and had been one of the first principals to introduce nourishing school meals. She was also involved with the local community around such projects as a youth club and the development of a park on derelict industrial land.

I will never forget the first time I saw Doris in the summer of 1939. She inspired me by her courage when she spoke for peace from the platform of the Brighton Town Hall.

First it is necessary to give Ecoso readers some background material on the period.

Those who have read "Defending the National Tuckshop" by Michael Cathcart (McPhee/Gribble/Penguin 1988) will know about the "White Guard" and "Australia's secret army intrigues" in the depression years.

Cathcart (on page 91) shows how this movement really began in 1919, soon after the First World War. He describes the key role played by Brigadier-General C.H. Brand in this fascist type of organisation.

In 1939, not long after Chamberlain's sell out to Hitler over the invasion of Czechoslovakia, when the Spanish Nationalist Government was being defeated and when Menzies was selling pig-iron to Japan, Brigadier-General Brand was again in the forefront of the anti-communist, war mongering campaigns.

"Patriotic" rallies were being held all over Victoria. Thugs were employed to "bash the reds". By the time a rally was to be held in Brighton the local people in the Movement Against War and Fascism decided to take a stand against the rally.

Through organising a petition and deputation they prevailed on the Council to include a peace speaker on the rally platform. It was arranged that Doris McRae should be the person.

Doris had been very much involved with the pacifist movement all her adult life. In 1937 she was elected by the Australian Teachers Federation to attend the first Pan Pacific Women's Peace Conference. This was held in Vancouver and Doris was elected to lead the Australian delegation. Thus Doris was very well known, publicly, as a distinguished peace supporter.

It was a huge rally. Military bands marched from the four corners of the municipality. It was a balmy summer evening and the crowd overflowed onto the lawns. Loud speakers were used to broadcast the meeting. Brigadier-General Brand presided.

When the time came for Doris to speak, he stood, saluted the Queen's photo, called on all loyal Australians to leave the meeting, and marched from the platform followed by the other speakers. Most of the audience stayed to hear Doris !

When she died in the spring of 1988 she was nearly 95. The Union of Australian Women held a memorial gathering for her at Coburg High School (one of the schools at which she had taught). Jenny Lewis (the daughter of Sam Lewis, a contemporary of Doris's, who was well known for his work in the N.S.W. Teachers Federation) sang and she included "Joe Hill" among the songs. The Hon. Joan Kirner MLA was the main speaker.

At that time Joan Kirner was Victorian Minister of Education, she is now Deputy Premier.

Joan had researched the Departments files to find out about Doris's teaching career. She revealed some facts which were new to most of those present. Doris rarely talked about her last days as a school principal and Joan gave the reasons.

In the late 1940s, coinciding with the Sharply Commission into Communism in Victoria, Doris was charged with teaching politics in the classroom.

One of the teachers on the staff reported to the Department that in her lessons she had told the class that one of the reasons for the rising cost of housing was that timber merchants were holding back supplies to make larger profits. This was indeed happening in this period of acute housing shortage.

The charge was dismissed by a Departmental Inquiry but the stress and strain of the period resulted in Doris retiring from teaching some years before the Departmental retiring age.

Joan Kirner pointed out that to date, the history of the period of the Cold War, has been mainly about the way the unions were affected, but that the first attacks were on women such as Doris.

Like Ailsa O'Connor, in 1950 Doris was one of the women to help to establish the Union of Australian Women (UAW).

At her ninetieth birthday party Doris paid the following tribute to the changes in the women's movement :-

"Living so much alone I was unaware of the depths of oppression so many women suffer. I welcome the way women are now organising around the issues which affect them."

Right into her nineties, Doris continued to help the UAW and the peace movement. She read documents and summarised them for reproduction in newsletters and other publications.

It was entirely in character that, right to the end of her long life, Doris used the skills that were left to her to contribute according to her ability to the causes she held dear.

D.A.T.E.

Documents Available Through Ecoso

And from the Union of Australian Women

Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane Melbourne, 3000

"Taking Time" (a women's historical data kit) compiled and edited by Yvonne Smith and published by the Union of Australian Women, printed by Sybylla Press, 1987. ISBN 0 949861 12X.

"A Handbook for Women Unionists" (a helpful source of information) published by the Union of Australian Women. ISBN 0 959 8730 4X

"Women and Technological Change", proceedings of a conference held in 1982 organised by the National Status Of Women Committee, United Nations Association of Australia.

"Women's Budget", 1989/90 a publication from the Women's Policy Unit of the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet. ISSN 1030 3189.

For more information on Ecoso Exchange and D.A.T.E. phone 03.328.2345, or write to Ruth Crow, 2/5 89 O'Shanassy St., North Melbourne 3051.

ECOSO EXCHANGE VALUE JUDGEMENTS

The revived Ecoso Exchange is using the guidelines worked out by the earlier Ecoso Exchange in 1975, soon after the Radical Ecology Conference. It also uses the value judgements stated in "Make Melbourne Marvellous" in 1985.

ECOSO EXCHANGE (1989 VERSION)

Ecoso Exchange is a newsletter for people involved in the ecological/sociological movements. It is based on the value judgements on these two pages. It is re-using the title of a similar newsletter of the 1970s.

VALUE JUDGEMENTS

from
"Make Melbourne Marvellous" (1985)

The sort of values suitable for a Socialist Australia should retain the well known socialist principles of abolishing exploitation and alienation but should be reformulated, it is suggested, to reflect also positive values that have emerged from new social movements, and more recent experiences of socialists.

Central to such reformulation should be an expansion of the age-old principle :- From Each According to Ability - To Each According to Needs.

This recognises that the development of new abilities to serve society, often associated with new technology and new social conditions, give rise to new needs; and changing needs, in turn, call forth and provide conditions for changing abilities; so that needs/abilities for socialism should include :-

- * A reasonable level of food, clothing, shelter, privacy and shared child rearing and domestic upkeep, so that the physical constraints do not hinder people from exercising their abilities.
- * Convenient opportunities for health, education and culture so that people's potential for developing greater and more diverse abilities are given scope.
- * Access, locally, to a reasonably diverse vital community and supportive, recreational and social activities so that social conditions can assist people to gain confidence to use their abilities to the full.
- * Complete eradication of all forms of male domination over females, on the job or in the home, to release women to a full range of areas in which their abilities can be exercised.
- * Respect for the natural environment and other species, so that human needs are designed in such a way that the "needs" of other forms of life are also taken into account, substituting qualitative growth for wasteful and destructive "growth-for-growth's-sake" that damages the ecology and threatens the ability of future generations to sustain life on earth for themselves and other species.

In short, the long established socialist values of sufficiency and equity need now to be supplemented with values which are anti-patriarchal, ecology respecting and committed to self-reliance and grass-roots democracy based on collectives.

ECOSO EXCHANGE GUIDELINES (used by Ecoso Exchange from 1973)

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

We who live in Western advanced countries have little chance other than to buy goods designed with built-in obsolescence. Thus a large proportion of hard work goes into fashioning materials which are mis-used or not fully used, so that the more there 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.

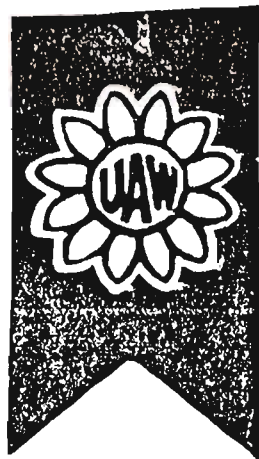
Under these conditions the limited natural and human resources are not only inequitably distributed but are also recklessly squandered with outrageous pollutions and destructions of the natural environment. As for the social environment, life and thinking become dominated by material possessions and this creates a barrier making it increasingly difficult for neighbours, work mates 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 human beings, uses less energy and preserves the world as a pleasant and habitable place.

Guidelines to Reverse Trends

- 1) A value judgement in favour of regeneration 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 and 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 desion of community including population size, where people can better relate to each other and nature in order to reduce wasteful goods and services and at the same time guaranteeing an adequate minimum subsistence for 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 requires a comprehensive, multi-directional, all-levels and participatory effort to achieve global ecological equilibrium.

Ecoso Exchange is one way of helping to reverse these trends.



Available Early in March
from
The Union of Australian Women
Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane,
Melbourne 3000
(03) 654 7409
Price \$5 plus \$2 postage

The Women's Charter

Stage 1

The Quest

