



Ecoso Exchange Newsletter

Crow Collection Association

Ecological, Social and Political Discourse

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See cover page for information on Ecoso and the Crow Collection

In this Ecoso

- Page 1. Stop Press ...Citizenship Indicators.
- Main issue... Some Ideas About Local Government
 - 1. A Central Municipal Library
 - 2. Local Government Art Collections
 - 4. How Democracy is Being Eroded..Angela Munro
Competitive Tendering (inside back page)
- RetrievalQuotes and Comments :-
 - 6. Renting Better Than Buying ?...Ted Dugdale
 - 7. Unionist Against Woodchip...Jack O'Mara
 - 7. Rural Women Celebrate with Song
 - 8. A Film about Women in Western Region,
- Bits and Pieces ... Other Issues
 - 8. Priority for Drivers - Delays for Pedestrians
 - 9. Channel 31 - Community TV's New Station
 - 9. Internet at Netcafe
 - 9. Search Scholarships.
 - 10. Vale Val Williams
- Cover Page :
 - 12. About Ecoso and the Crow Collection

STOP PRESS, STOP PRESS, STOP PRESS.

Just as this Ecoso was going to the printer we received a copy of the Discussion Paper on a System of National Citizenship Indicators which has been published by the Commonwealth Senate Legal and Constitutional Reference Committee. In the covering letter it is stated :-

The Committee hopes that the inquiry will make a substantive contribution to public understanding and debate on the meaning of the Australian community, social and economic rights and the development of our democratic society.

The Committee has called for submissions and will be holding public hearings (Information from Mr Stephen Bull 06,277 3563).

Main Issue

SOME IDEAS ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

*I know of no safe repository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves, and if we think they are not enlightened enough to exercise their control, or wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion. To remain democratic, a society must find ways to put specialised knowledge into the service of public choice, and keep it from becoming the power base for an elite. (Thomas Jefferson, 1812) * See end note.*

A CENTRAL MUNICIPAL LIBRARY.

What meaning does the Thomas Jefferson's quote (above) have for us today when we are face to face with coping with the immensity of "specialised knowledge" now available through technology ?

What new issues, as regards dissemination of information, are being raised by the debates on Citizenship and an Australian Republic ?

How can we prevent "specialised knowledge" from becoming a power base of an elite when all three tiers of government are encouraging privatisation and systems of "user pays" ?

Will cost cutting reduce the effectiveness of our local government information centres (our municipal libraries) ?

How can a defensive campaign be turned into an offensive campaign. ?

The perennial community problem is becoming more important :-

How to turn protest movements into campaigns not only to retain what already exists but to give the community a vision of how its community assets can be used more effectively.

A recent report by Colin Watson (a submission to the Capital City Policy Committee) contributes to developing a strategy for answering these concerns.

Colin calls for a central Melbourne municipal library such as those provided in Sydney and Brisbane. He emphasises that municipal libraries are the major cultural and educational activity of local government. He uses an extract from the 1993 Sydney City Council's Annual Report to list the services provided by it. For example :-

The Sydney City Library is used by residents, the workforce and visitors to the city. By the end of 1993 over 66,000 people were registered members using the library's lending, information and newspaper services, the latter consisting of 150 daily local, interstate and overseas newspaper. The library's Info service answers telephone inquiries about theatre performances, concerts, exhibitions, festivals, special events and adult education course and provides information for tourists.

The Library's special collections include music scores, plays - many in multiple copies for play reading - and a growing collection of audio-visual material such as compact discs, language learning tapes, videos and talking books.

Colin points out that :-

A central library in the Melbourne Municipality has been on the agenda since the introduction of State subsidies in

1948, and particularly since the State Library closed its decrepid lending division about 20 years ago. On the other hand the City of Sydney has a long history of a central municipal library, independent of the State Library of New South Wales, although that library has been much better resourced than the State Library of Victoria.

Basing his ideas on the NSW examples Colin describes the the relationship which could be developed between the State Library and a Central Melbourne Municipal Library :-

The Victorian State Library is a reference, research and archival library for the whole State; the proposed central municipal library, primarily a lending library, must complement the collections and services of the State Library, usage of the State Library which is not compatible with its essential and unique roles should be identified, and as much as possible of such usage diverted away from pressures on the State Library e.g students from the suburbs with a relatively narrow range of resource needs, or just study places, users of current newspapers and magazines; video viewing, in co-operation with resources and facilities of the State Film Centre's projected new premises.

He points out that most of the existing libraries in the inner Melbourne neighbourhoods are well served by public transport and thus more accessible to people living in other suburbs where accessibility to the local library is car based. He recommends some scheme to co-ordinate these inner urban collections with the central municipal lending library and thus developing a "a massive resource supporting a level of service which a modern city needs in the age of the information society."

What is being done ? Did you know that there is an organisation called Friends of Libraries Australia ? Their address is PO Box 436, Tullamarine, Victoria 3043 FOLA was launched on December 9th, 1994, its membership subscription for individuals is \$10. and for libraries and clubs it is \$20.00.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ART COLLECTIONS

Did you know that :-

Local government provides and operates many art collections in Victoria which constitute a significant asset for the people of the state.(?)

The above is a quote from an article in the Australian Municipal Journal (January/February 1995) which reports on research by Ruth Rentschler who has been locating works of art and interviewing the people responsible for their management. The article concludes :-

Councils going through changes involved in restructuring may find that they have surplus buildings which could be used to house their art collections

Councils undergoing change need to have symbols and rituals to develop a sense of community and an art collection is an excellent model for a community development exerciseThere is an opportunity to consider developing an overall policy for collections management for local government in Victoria.

To date the local government art collections have tended to develop piecemeal. Clock towers have been one of the many strange storage places for paintings and photographs. How can these collections be made available to the public ?

(Permission to reprint from Angela Munro)

14 THE AGE WEDNESDAY 24 MAY 1995

Edited by
JOHN MESSER

How democracy is being eroded in Melbourne

from Angela Munro

The Minister for Local Government, Mr Roger Hallam, claims to be seizing a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to equip local government for the 21st century". Yet less than a decade ago the coalition used its control of the upper house to prevent municipal reform.

The Local Government Further Amendment Act, now before the Legislative Council, is the latest in a succession of changes whose combined effects belie their claimed objectives. The contradictions are most obvious in the City of Melbourne.

Ostensibly aiming to strengthen the Melbourne City Council's strategic capacity and its focus on a "capital city role", the Government has removed major sites from the council's planning control, such as Southbank and the Showgrounds. It has also legislated to enable unprecedented intervention in the council's budget process.

Keen to reduce the supposed burden of services on business, the Government has excised residential areas and created a CBD council. Unlike the amalgamations in provincial cities, this will actually minimise economies of scale and increase the proportion of rates drawn from business.

Claiming to seek a more representative council, the state has legis-

lated to allow businesses two votes, and partnerships as many votes as there are partners. Given the disinclination of businesses to enrol, let alone vote, the state will now force businesses to vote for a council with greatly reduced powers.

The effect of compulsory postal voting (quite apart from its administrative complexity and openness to corruption) will be to discourage high-calibre councillors whom the state claims to seek.

Assuming a minimum of 80 cents per communication with 28,000 voters, a candidate would require \$22,000 to contest one of the five city-wide seats. This cost will clearly entrench party politics in council, an outcome that the Minister for Local Government has deplored.

Faced with these contradictions, it's hard to avoid the following conclusions: the state has rigged the boundary, the franchise and the electoral system of the City of Melbourne to favor business (more accurately, property interests); not content with such a gerrymander, it has assumed the right to supervise the council's budget.

It's time for a Victorian Constitutional Convention in order to retrieve the democratic rights we once assumed to be inalienable.

Angela Munro,
Parkville.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND DEMOCRACY

Early in April Angela Munro was one of the conveners of a public meeting which brought together eight resident organisations in the Melbourne Municipality. One result of the meeting was that on April 13th the Age gave pride of place to a letter warning that the proposed new electoral system in the City of Melbourne would disenfranchise residents. Did you miss the letter? Here are three quotes :-

Most alarmingly, the proposals fail to enshrine the principal of one vote one value. Under the proposed system the city will have only nine councillors, with five elected city wide and four from individual wards - presumably to minimise the strength of local community-based concerns on council.

Incorporated businesses will receive two votes. By one interpretation, with votes for partners and absent property owners, business may control over 50 % of the total vote.

With the rights the State Government has established over the budget of the city and the voting rights it has allowed business partnerships under the Local Government Act 1993, such changes establish an unprecedented domination by business over the rights of individual residents.

On the same page of the Age another letter was published. This one was from a former mayor of Northcote who appealed to the Premier and State Government ministers to :-

Leave local government to be accountable to local communities and let the state politicians get on with the job that they have been put there for, that is running the state of Victoria.

His letter explained why he was deeply disturbed that the Minister for Local Government is proposing legislation to cap rates for at least three years and the threats by the Premier that commissioners and councillors will be dismissed if they do not meet Government expectation of cutting council costs.

He described the complex operation of balancing community expectation and the community's willingness and capacity to pay local taxation and other council changes is best judged through the ballot box :-

Surely accountability for local taxation and spending is not the responsibility of the Premier or the minister but is something between local decision makers and their respective communities within accountable guidelines that exist for local government

It is the community's prerogative and responsibility to provide the appropriate mandate to the council, for which after all it is paying, not Messrs Kennett and Hallam.

* End Note :-The quote from Thomas Jefferson is on the cover of the draft

discussion paper on *Community Participation in Local Government*, which is now available from Rainbow Alliance, 124 Napier Street Fitzroy (03) 419.3613. The timely Rainbow draft paper gives a useful base for discussion on how to develop community involvement around local government issues.

Retrieval

QUOTES AND COMMENTS

Thanks to Ecoso subscribers who have sent in newsclippings. In this Ecoso we quote from and comment on extracts from a number of publications. (The title "Retrieval" is used in recognition of the valuable political contribution made by the 1970s publication "Retrieval")

RENTING BETTER THAN BUYING

From the Chadstone Progress Press, a letter from Ted Dugdale on home ownership and public housing :-

When one compares a new Ford Falcon for around \$30,000 with a new house at around \$75,000 and notice the intricacies, curves and precisions in the Falcon and the crumbling chip board and plaster in the house, one can only conclude houses should be cheaper than cars.

The fact that they are not is due to corruption by protectionism in many forms. This is foisted on the public by the bleating of the doctrine of exaggerated consequences.

But the buildings merge with the land and are generally worth nothing after about fifty years.

Whether we pay to the bank and call it interest or to a landlord and call it rental, both are the price of RENT advantage

But there is no advantage in owning or buying unless this price is increasing faster than interest and rental.

I am convinced that young people today are far better off keeping their deposits and renting than buying.

Further, rather than pay rental and its identical twin, interest, to banks and landlords and lawyers and loan sharks, we would all be better off if we paid rental to councils and abolished income tax.

For those interested in this issue there is a valuable text book available called *The Great Australian Nightmare... a Critique of the Home-ownership Ideology*. It was written by Jim Kemeny and published by Georgian House (Melbourne) as long ago as 1983. (ISBN 0 85585 506 1) Jim Kemeny argues that the "Great Australian Dream" has :-

increased the cost of housing considerably beyond cost covering limits; it has diverted vast amounts of domestic savings away from industry and into housing, so increasing

Australian dependence on foreign capital; it has created a class divided tenure system, it has been a major factor in the development of Australia's privatised and energy-inefficient cities; it has weakened demands for a more adequate welfare state; it has amplified the maldistribution of housing, by increasing overcrowding among the young and underutilization of housing by the old; and it has contributed to a general conservatism and ideological commitment to the status quo.

As can be judged from the above statement Jim writes very concisely. He has packed his arguments to support his contentions into about one hundred pages of challenging text.

A much more recent text book on housing tenure is *The Radical Home Owner* by Ian Winter (published by Gordon and Breach, 1994, ISBN 2 88449 028 0). Ian Winter challenges the idea that home ownership promotes loyal citizenship and political stability.

UNIONIST AGAINST WOOD CHIPPING..... "TOO OLD TO RAT !"

Jack O'Mara has contributed articles on community and labour issues to the Geelong Advertiser for more than twenty years. For 53 years he was a member of what is now called the Construction, Forestry and Mining Employees Union. In March he wrote protesting at this union's support for woodchipping. He pointed out that

Australian hardwoods are among the best furniture and building timbers in the world and should not be woodchipped. Sawn-log processing and sustainable forestry methods would provide as much employment for the union's members as woodchip.

I am, a devotee of Henry Lawson who once said "I'm twenty years a union man and I am too old to rat !" I am a 53 years a union man so my commitment is much greater and I feel I must protest.

RURAL WOMEN CELEBRATE WITH SONG

Perhaps few city people know that there is a publication called Rural Women's Network. It has two major objectives. Firstly, to link women's groups and interested individuals into a network towards sharing skills to meet the needs of rural women. Secondly to enable women, through their own contact and support network, to have a more active and influential role in government decisions which affect their lives and those of their families and communities. If you would like more information about this magazine phone (053) 336 785.

A recent "Network" featured a tape of songs called *Cows Kids and Calculations*, The article explains :-

Women on the land are invisible workers; acknowledged traditionally as farmer's wife, mother, carer and housewife, but only recently as an equal partner on the farms.

The article describes several poems and songs, for example one that is called Shopping Days :-

It tells the story of the "just jobs" we all do. The woman is about the drive into town for some special social occasion, when she is asked to pick up all those essential farming needs; the driveshaft for the tractor, the wool sacks, some aggi pipes, the timber needed for a job on hand. Of course she agrees but the time line takes some arranging.

In summary the article states :-

This tape reflects so accurately the words and values of rural women that everytime it is listened to will be another celebration of their lives and work.

(The cassette is available from Jill Stevens, 12 Lindon Strike Court, Research, 3095 for \$18.00)

A FILM ABOUT WOMEN IN THE WESTERN REGION

The Brimbank News which has a big circulation in the Western Region, featured an article on the award winning 60 minute film "Only the Brave" which is based in the script writer, Ana Kokkonis's life in the Western Region of Melbourne's. In the interview Ana says :-

The film is not autobiographical, but the people in the film are tough like the ones I grew up with. I was pretty tough myself. But I was bright too, and had come to terms with wanting to be tough and brainy. That was hard, but being a teenager is hard.

Ms Kokkonis said she wanted the film to reflect contemporary society as it is lived in the west within the confines of the area's particular cultural and socio-economic framework. the reality is we live in a predominantly patriarchal society, where the girls are still expected to perform and sexual relations are still dictated by men.

(The Next Ecoso will be published in September when the the World Conference of Women is being held in Beijing. These two extracts, above, on two different types of cultural contributions women are making to Australian society have been retrieved in this Ecoso to draw attention to this gathering of Women. Later Ecoso will include some material on the outcomes of this Conference.)

Other Issues

BITS AND PIECES

PRIORITY FOR DRIVERS..... DELAYS FOR PEDESTRIANS

A proposed new national road code, if adopted, could give cars more power to dominate our streets and other public spaces. The plan is to reverse the current "give way" rule for pedestrians and drivers in residential streets giving cars priority.

The explanatory document states :-

The change should result in some delays for pedestrians and some reduced delays for drivers. These effects should balance.(?!)

By the way, Vicroads (which has a history of underestimating traffic growth) predict traffic growth of 40% between 1990 and 2005. (More information on the Road Code from Mr David South, Australian Road Rules, PO Box 13105, Law Courts, Melbourne 3000 or phone 03 321 8427.)

CHANNEL 31 ...IT IS YOUR STATION

Those of us who were involved in the 1970s establishing community newspapers such as the Learning Exchange, the North Melbourne News and the City Alternative News and those who supported the floundering steps taken to establish community radios such as 3CR will be heartened by the announcement that Channel 31 has now been officially launched.

The Melbourne Community Television Consortium was established in 1991 to co-ordinate the activities of community television groups, with the purpose of providing community television services to the greater metropolitan area.

In February 1993, the Australian Broadcasting Authority made the sixth channel UHF 31 available for non profit community and educational use. In March the same year the Consortium was granted a licence for the channel.

Channel 31 is a non profit, community and educational service which receives no funding. The station raises money through subscriptions, sponsorship announcements and provision of air time for educational and other external providers.

(For information about Channel 31 please contact Peter Lane or Lee Cartledger, 3/247 Flinders Lane Melbourne 3000, please enclose a self addressed, stamped envelope). Telephone 03. 650 5610 and Fax 03. 650 6924.

INTERNET AT NETCAFE

Netcafe (upstairs) at the Deluxe Deli, 94a Acland Street St Kilda claims to be Melbourne's first "cybercafe". It provides customers with their very own global computer network. There is a small Internet access price for those who want to hook into Internet while sipping their coffee.

SEARCH SCHOLARSHIPS - UP TO \$10,000,

Applications are invited from people currently engaged in (or about to commence) a research, writing or cultural project which is judged to make a contribution to the labour and progressive movements in Australia.

The SEARCH FOUNDATION will award scholarships to assist with the costs of such a project. Priority will be given to projects which have good prospects of publication or other public use of the results, but which do not have access to other funding.

SEARCH is an independent non-profit foundation established to assist activities which promote social justice and the development of a more democratic and egalitarian society.

(For more information SEARCH, Room 608, 3 Smail Street, Broadway, NSW 2007, Phone (02) 211 4164 or Fax (02) 211 1407)

VALE VAL WILLIAMS

The Crow Collection Association lost one of its staunchest supporters when Val Williams died a few weeks ago. Val was treasurer for the Association and regularly helped with the mail out of Ecoso.

Val lived in Sunshine for most of her adult life and the Crow Collection Association greatly benefitted from her knowledge of community organisations in the Western Region and from her knowledge about women's issues through her membership in the Union of Australian Women and the Sunshine International Women's Group.

SUBSCRIPTIONS TO ECOSO

To cover costs of this newsletter it is necessary to charge a subscription of \$10 for six issues. A number on your mail out slip will indicate when your subscription is due. For example, this Ecoso is number 2/35. If the number 35 is on your slip it means that you have paid for this Ecoso but your sub. is now due. Number 36 indicates that your sub. will be due after you receive your next Ecoso.

Cheques should be made payable to the Crow Collection and sent to the Hon Sec, Sheila Byard, Dept of Social and Urban Policy, Victoria University of Technology, Box 14428 MMC, Melb 3000.

Ruth Crow, Co-ordinator of the Crow Collection Association, has changed her address. It now is :

Ruth Crow, 49/9 Pampas St., North Melb 3051. Phone (03) 9329 8685.

YOUR IDEAS ARE NEEDED

There are two main areas in which your ideas are especially needed :-

1. Ideas on sources of material on issues affecting women. Our next Ecoso will be published in September when the United Nations will be holding the World Conference of Women in Beijing where there will be discussions on population, environment, women's health and reproduction; biodiversity; international trade, women and their Asian arms race, education for empowerment and much more.

2. Several organisations are planning a Spring Seminar which will have the aim of contributing to public understanding of the meaning of citizenship, democracy, participative planning, and other such issues which are fundamentally affecting changes in the life style of the Australian community.

If you can help please get in touch with Sheila Byard (address above)

Competitive tendering - need for strategic decisions

Louise Glanville, Senior Lecturer, Department of Urban and Social Policy

While many of us may only think of our local councils on rubbish collection days or when the next instalment of the rates is due, there is currently a strong and compelling argument for greater diligence in our contemplation of this sphere of government. For at this very moment a relatively silent revolution is occurring, one which will transform the nature and functioning of local government in Victoria. Driven by the State Government, the two key platforms of the reform agenda for local government are amalgamations and compulsory competitive tendering (CCT). While few could mount reasonable argument against the need for some municipal boundary reforms - not discounting the fact that the associated suspension of elected representatives, and the imposition of State appointed commissioners is clearly of real concern and an obvious attack on local democracy - the imperatives surrounding CCT as it is being introduced in Victoria are less convincing.

Put simply, compulsory tendering is the mandatory exposure of local government services to competition in the open market. This is not a new phenomenon for councils, as much of their work, particularly in the physical and technical services areas has often

been the subject of a tendering process. However, the new legislation compels councils to put a minimum of 50 per cent of their total budget out to tender within three years. As a result of depreciation costs and other charges - such as those related to interest - some municipalities have already suggested that in reality this percentage figure will be closer to 80 per cent, a possibility which renders the CCT reforms particularly insidious and far-reaching in effect.

Like much of what happens in Victoria these days, compulsory competitive tendering as a policy direction is derived from Thatcher's Britain. To date, in the British experience, local governments have only been required to put a limited number of specified services out to competitive tender. However in Victoria, the prescribed percentage targets - and their realistic translation into practice as indicated above - in all likelihood means that with very few exceptions, most areas of local government activity will be exposed to the tendering process. Local authorities will probably have little choice therefore about how they meet these percentage targets, this being in contrast to the freedom of choice and direction for local government, which the Victorian CCT legislation supposedly encompassed. Furthermore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that appointed Commissioners and Chief Executive Officers will have a particular interest



in ensuring that they achieve the specified targets as minimums and receive as a result, a big tick on their first year report card from the State Government!

Many issues are raised by the introduction of CCT in Victoria, yet perhaps the most critical relates to the role of local government, whether it is simply an agent of the state or rather an independent sphere of government involved in policy making and the development of conditions for local democracy. This issue has a

long history in Victoria as elsewhere and remains I believe the central contemporary debate surrounding the existence and operation of local government. The advent of and process of introduction for CCT seems to suggest that the State Government views its local counterpart as little more than an agent, to implement policy directions determined centrally. Is this all we would expect of local government and should such an affront to local democracy be tolerated? In this context, it is perhaps particularly disappointing that there has been so little leadership from local government itself and from peak industry bodies in Victoria, in influencing directions and legislative development and in advocating for a strong, vibrant and independent local level government.

For service users, many questions remain to be answered including how the provision of services will be monitored after they have been tendered out, what mechanisms will exist for dealing with complaints or grievances and whether quality will remain a key feature in the initial assessment and ongoing monitoring of any contract for service, in the face of efficiency demands related to lowest cost. Service users may also quite appropriately question how local government will remain a key planner and coordinator of activities and programs - ensuring that local needs are addressed - in situations

where it may be totally separated from any role in the provision of services.

While compulsory competitive tendering may very well come with some positive features - for example its capacity to act as a prompt for local government to improve and develop its services - it remains a radical and rapidly introduced reform with many concerning elements, not least of which appears to be the attitude of many people within the industry to CCT itself. Local government staff at all levels, elected councillors and appointed commissioners must understand that managing the introduction of CCT must be much more than just complying with State Government dictates. Local government should remember that it is a sphere of government in its own right; it has the capacity to be strategic in its decisions and that compliance with State Government directions alone may well lead it on the road to nowhere. To ignore this perspective would be to yield to central agendas which will ultimately hasten the demise of strong and representative local governments.

Nexus is published fortnightly by the VUT.

If you would like to contribute a Nexus commentary, please contact the Public Affairs Branch. Commentary authors take responsibility for the views expressed in this column.

Ecoso Exchange Guidelines

Adopted 1973

1. Ecoso has 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 over such activities.
2. A consequent recognition of the necessity for change in life-style and behaviour patterns to one that sees the quality of life as an alternative to consumerism, understood as mass production and consumption of wasteful and unsatisfactory goods and services based on compulsion and 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 size of population, where people can relate to each other and to nature in order to reduce wasteful goods and services and at the same time guaranteeing an adequate minimum subsistence for all, using modern technology to this end.
4. The recognition that such objectives cannot be achieved either on the basis of practical, linear, one-level ecological remedies or with authoritarian and manipulative control of affairs and requires participatory effort to achieve global equilibrium.

(Subscription to Ecoso Newsletter \$10 for 6 issues. Ecoso was first published from 1967 to 1980. It was revived in 1988. The Crow Collection Association was formed in 1990. It has adopted Ecoso as its newsletter. More information about the Crow Collection and Ecoso from the address below.)



Crow Collection Association (Incorp.)
A Living Library to Plan for the 21st Century

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