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ECOSO EXCHANGE NEWSLETTER

2/2, February 1989

Contents of this Newsletter

This newsletter is mainly about the process of creating community but it also includes some information on transport reports from Victoria and Western Australia and a few other environmental news items.

Enclosures :- Double page spread of chart published in Economic Strategy for Social Change and a Sustainable Community, (1986); a statement on Local Plans (principles agreed at the "Better Living with Less Energy" Seminar 1980) and extracts from Age article by Kenneth Davidson. An invitation to the next Ecoso Alfresco Meal in the Gardens.

The D.A.T.E. Pages (Documents Available Through Ecoso) gives details of documents referred to in this newsletter plus some information on rather unique sets of documents which are available through D.A.T.E.

Newsletter readers will all have received a copy of the Ecoso Guidelines in their last newsletter. If you missed out and want them, please phone (03) 328.2345.

Ideas on Creating Community

Early in January, 1989, Katharine West was reported as proposing a new Community Party (see extract from article in this newsletter). It is timely to remember that Hitler's Nazi Party's full name was the National Socialist Party and thus by using the word "socialist" he rallied people to destroy the socialist movements.

How can the movement for a New Left Party unite the community movements and thus defend them from from these charlatans of the right ?

This issue of Ecoso includes some ideas from a variety of sources about the process of creating community. Firstly, here are three quotes, these will be followed by reviews of five recent documents.

"From Towards Socialism in Australia"

(published by the Communist Party of Australia 1979)

This quote is from the section on "Democratic, Self-management Socialism" and has the sub-heading of "Voluntary Organisations".

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

From Economic Strategy for Social Change and a Sustainable Future (ESSC), published by the Conserver Economic Group, Melb 1986.

"This diverse community movement, or rather group of movements, has a vital role to play in promoting ESSC and would be greatly strengthened by it. Change needs to occur both within the state-provided services and in the organisations of community co-operatives. Thus increased state intervention in the economy could both facilitate and be complemented or balanced by the development of co-operative community organisations, i.e. housing co-ops, health co-ops etc.

"Increased employment in activities responding to community needs (housing, transport, health, education and training, child care, community arts and media) must occur within the context of devolution of control, breaking down centralised, bureaucratic and paternalistic forms of organisation. Both the workers and the users involved in these activities must have the opportunity to participate in their management, and the locus of control must shift from the central bureaucracies to the regions, municipalities and neighbourhoods."

(Essc was distributed at both the Broad Left Conference and the Getting Together Conference at Easter in 1986. The chart on the double page spread is from this document)

From Restructuring Health and Welfare
by Ric Mohr (Tribune Aug 17, 1983).

The article stated that Ric was "a member of the NSW Community Health Association and the Social Welfare Action Group.

"This is a time of crisis; there will surely be a considerable restructuring of the health and welfare sector in the coming months and years, and yet the consumers, the unions and the left are having great trouble agreeing on any directions or tactics.

"Faced with such problems it seems necessary to go back to fundamental principles and social theory to see if any of the answers can be found there. In fact, going back to these theories, I have been struck by the fact that this is where some of the problems seem to begin.

"I think there are some basic problems with the theoretical equipment we've been using to analyse the welfare state.

"Its almost exclusive focus on the state's role in serving capital, and on the tyranny of economics, has led us to lose sight of some of the political ends and tactical options which might be available.

"I also suggest it's high time we came to terms with the contradiction between our criticism of the state as a 'lackey of capitalism', and our simultaneous vehement defence of that state's present activities.

"To understand the truly political nature of our struggle we must look closely at our longer term goals, and what role the state might have in achieving them.

"If we really do want a little more of the same, then, we can be content with a simple 'fight the cuts' campaign."

From Community Consumerism and Class
(An examination of the works of Martin Mowbray on 'Localism')
Ruth and Maurie Crow (1984).

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

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

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

Some Ideas on "From Grey to Green"

An article by Jack Munday in the Australian Left Review No 108, December 1988 describes how the eighties have seen the rise 'of urban movements, all focussing on oppression and alienation in the late twentieth century metropolis.'

Jack Munday argues "that urban issues and the alliances they promise provide a road out of the left's current morass."

The article provides factual material from many parts of the world and describes the controversy over the Green Bans when "when some of the dogmatists of the Left were claiming the BLF was the 'darling of the middle class trendies'".

He criticises the "unimpressive performance of the left union movement and its total lack of creativity around social issues" and he rightly asks :-

"What is the use of improving wages and working conditions if we live in cities devoid of sufficient parks, trees, and sunshine ? We can win a shorter working week but we still must live 168 hours each week." (Ecoso emphasis).

"Expressions of thought such as a real quality of living must replace the more narrow, economist-orientated 'standard of living' which conjures up a quantitative rather than a qualitative mentality and state of mind," he writes.

He asks the questions :-

"After all, who lives in the least leafy suburbs ? Who is subjected to increasing road noise, who has least open space ? Everything that impinges on working people as citizens should be the right, and indeed the responsibility of trade unions."

Thanks Jack ! It is a very useful article.

Here are three comments. It is hoped that this will stimulate more discussion on the important issues you have raised :-

Comment 1. The problem of finding ways of linking the trade union movement and the community movement is presented in the chart on the double spread in this newsletter.

Comment 2. Surely the future we are working for includes much more than "sufficient parks, trees and sunshine." less road noise and more open space.

The Ecoso Guidelines (see last issue of Ecos Newsletter) presents some ideas on 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" and also emphasises the development of new human abilities.

Comment 3. To quote a popular warning of a few years ago :- "Humans are our most endangered species". This is true not only because of the threat of nuclear war but also because of the destruction of human relationships.

The Ecoso Guidelines state :- "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."

The urgency of building alliance, as referred to in the lead-in to Jack's article, is not because there is a need for "a road out of the left's current morass", but because "Humans are the most endangered species," and the left can be a force to reverse this, if it gets out of its "current morass."

New Forms of Regional Organisation ?

Here are some quotes from Inner Urban Rave (a newsletter produced by the Inner Melbourne Ministerial Advisory Committee)

These paragraphs about the Pope Report (Regional Consultative Review Report) are reproduced to indicate some of the new forms of regional organisation which are developing in Victoria which could result in more effective ways of community involvement.

"Two major questions arose, that needed answering :- Were RCCs (Regional Consultative Councils) to be the peak consultative body to be resourced accordingly, or were they just one of a number of advisory bodies.

"A number of proposals were put in the report that outlined the criteria on which future regional structures should be based. They included : a core membership of representatives from local government (or regional groupings of councils), non government agencies, regional human service networks, community networks, special interest groups, Community Services Victoria (CSV) and other relevant State Government Departments; open-ness to non-members and community involvement; promotion and involvement of disadvantaged groups; encouragement of co-operative relationships between planning and advisory bodies, local government and regional councils, and direct advice to the Minister for Community Services.

"Although these criteria have been suggested, agreement has yet to be reached on a final approach for a peak body for RCCs."

(Copies of the Pope Report are available on loan from the CSV offices, 03.654.4222).

Community Development in Health

An exciting collection of reference materials for community health workers and all interested in community development in health has just been published by the Community Development in Health Project of the District Health (DHC)* Program.

The collection documents the achievements of community development work in the health field, drawing out lessons which can be gained from these experiences

The material comes in a plastic binder and includes case studies of community health projects, a theoretical over-view, a discussion paper on planning, evaluation, research and accountability a bibliography a reading guide, documentation of a peer support program, a directory of resources and posters.

A limited number of copies is available. More information from PO Box 57, Northcote 3070 or by phoning 03.482.2127.

* In Victoria, District Health Councils have been set up in order to make health services and health planners more responsive to local needs and views of local people. The first eleven DHCs were established in 1986. District boundaries vary, with the average having a population of about 100,000.

Local Government and Multiculturalism

A number of "Policy Option Papers" have been commissioned by the Federal Government's Office of Multicultural Affairs. These are on the Arts, Culture and Media; Community Relations; Education; Employment; Health and Welfare; the Law and Local Government.

The report on Local Government was prepared by Angela Munro on behalf of the Municipal Association of Victoria. Its recommendations clearly state the changes which have to be made at Commonwealth, State and Local Government levels and by State Associations of Councils, Ethnic Affairs Commission or Local Government as may be appropriate for each State.

Emphasis is placed on building on earlier reports on access and equity, such as the 1979 Report of the Commonwealth Standing Committee on Social Welfare ("Through a Glass Darkly"), the 1986 Review of Migrant and Multicultural Programs and Services (ROMAMPAS) and the Report on Intergovernmental Aspects of the Provision of Post Arrival Services for Immigrants (ACIR) as well as Commonwealth policy.

Local Government represents terra incognita to the Commonwealth, yet it is uniquely equipped, if resourced and consulted to act as a sensor and transmitter between the community and central governments," the report states.

Comment :- Such a report indicates the way local government is changing from being mainly concerned with physical planning (paving, garbage, parks and street lighting) to working in partnership with state and federal governments on human services.

Challenges in the Community Sector

"Opportunities and Challenges Facing the Community Sector (in the Arts, Environment and human Services)" is the name of a discussion paper prepared by a group of five social research workers for two Victorian Trusts (The Sidney Myer Foundation and the Lance Reichstein Foundation). The report is available from Equasearch) 03.419.3797.

Although based on Victorian experiences and mainly directed at those employed in the community sector, this is a text book for people involved in community movements all over Australia.

Its first six chapters deal with six topics :- Economic Policy, Employment and industrial Relations, Education and Training, Human Services, Environment and Conservation, Arts and Cultural Development; each ending with a section on opportunities and challenges. Its seventh chapter brings the six topics together through presenting common challenges and opportunities.

A fairly wide cross section of people (including council officers, councillors, academics, community workers and consumers of services) was involved in the workshops and in studying the background papers during the preparation of the report.

Rapid Transit Options in Perth

Two transportation reports have recently been considered by the Western Australian Government. The one based on railed public transport has been given the "go a-head".

Last year the Western Australian Minister of Transport set up an Expert Panel in response to requests for further information to provide a perspective on Perth's public transport problems and to give another view on the Travers Morgan's analysis.

The first report by Travers Morgan used an elaborate computer model and proposed an all bus system.

The second report studied experiences in other cities :- Atlanta, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Edmonton, Calgary, Ottawa, Washington, Singapore and Los Angeles. This report was prepared by Associate Professor Peter Newman, Murdoch University; David F. Howard, Director General Tyne and Wear Transport, Newcastle (England) and Dr Vukan Vuchic, Professor of Engineering at University of Pennsylvania (USA)

This team stated that "the best option would be a rail trunk line with feeder buses". The Government has accepted the Newman Report and will build a new train line to the north. Let us hope the election results in February will not mean a reversal of the decision.

"Arcadian Yearnings Result in Sprawl"

Kenneth Davidson in an article in the Melbourne Age on 5/1/'89 used the strange heading of "Have the Looney Toons Taken Over ?"

He explained that the "toons" were cartoon characters, so don't be miffed by the article's title; rather, concentrate on the extracts reprinted in the double page spread of this newsletter, because the "Newman" he quotes is the same person as the challenger to the all-bus plan for Perth.

Reports from Western Australia

A number of reports on transport issues in Western Australia are in the D.A.T.E. collection; for example, "An Urban Vision for an Urban Future" by Jeffrey Kenworthy (1987); "Transport Energy Conservation Through Urban Planning and Lifestyle Changes" by Jeffrey Kenworthy; "Transport and Urban Form in Thirty-Two of the World Cities" by Peter Newman and Jeffrey Kenworthy and the report mentioned above which is called "A Review of Northern Suburbs Rapid Transport Options".

There is also a 1988 report which conservationists may find useful. It is by Peter Newman, Neal Ryan and Pat Carnegie and is on "Coogee Biotechnology Park" (Coogee in W.A. not N.S.W.). It mainly deals with recycling waste from what has been the noxious trades. It states :-

"In this park it is possible to begin with animals from the hinterland and produce high value food products, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics and clothing that are basic ingredients in the economy."

Union Public Transport Plan

The Victorian Trades Hall Council and nine unions involved in public transport services have prepared the Union Metplan which presents ideas for taking Melbourne's public transport system into the twenty-first century.

The target is to achieve at least a 35% increase in public transport patronage over the next fifteen years, compared to the 20% targetted by the Metropolitan Transport Authority's (MTA) draft Metplan.

The unions propose a new approach to funding including the idea of the MTA devloping and managing commercial projects around District and Local Centres which are nodes in the transport system. "These commercial activities should return net reveue to the MTA while providing diverse job oportunites for MTA employess and maintainhg that all important staff presence on the Met system", the report states.

Melbourne's Central Area Transport

The Road Transport Authority has recently released its CATS Report (Central Area Transport Study). Although it has the strategic objective of encouraging public transport "to increase its share of trips" there is no similar consideration of making greater use of the railed transport system for movement of freight.

The Report is available from Road Transport Authority, 3 Prospect Hill Road Camberwell, Vic. 3124, o3.811.8111.

Powerline Review

Three reports from the Powerline Review Panel (Vic. Dept. of Industry, Technology and Resources have been received just as Ecoso was about to be finalised. Here is a brief statement on them.

The Brunswick to Richmond powerline dispute has many parallels in other parts of Australia. There is no easy answer to the difficulties of providing powerline infrastructure to service community needs in situations where serious environmental conflict occur. Thus there are major challenges confronting governments, power utilities and communities in achieving acceptable decision-making processes and resolving conflicting priorities.

Mandate to Continue

Thanks to all those who have responded to Ecoso by sending in subscriptions and donations. The response has given quite a mandate to continue (and, of course, the very necessary cash !)

Also thanks to Peter, Ewan, Barbara, Colin, Gib, Vin, David, Angela, Jack, Sheila and Ted for sending in documents. As will be seen from this newsletter some of the material is being popularised through its pages and through the D.A.T.E. collection. Also special thanks to interstate readers for subscriptions and material.
