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ECOSO EXCHANGE NEWSLETTER

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Theme of This Ecoso

The main articles in this Ecoso Exchange Newsletter are about the process of creating sustainable communities. Extracts from speeches by academics in Perth, Sydney and Adelaide have been used for this information.

The three contributors present sustainability from three different angles. What is inspiring about these three contributions is that all three have hope in the future and all three recognise that sustainability depends on the involvement of people around issues affecting their lives.

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The Future of the Ecoso Documents

The Ecoso documents are now in the Library of the Footscray Institute of Technology (FIT). This means that the Crow documents are still kept in tact and available through DATE, despite the fact that Ruth Crow has moved to a smaller flat (see information on wrapper)

FIT has a policy of acquiring "personal collections". To date they have two collections, the Vacari Collection on Ethnic Issues and the White Collection on Australian Literature.

The Ecoso Collection will be their third. Ecoso readers have already received some information on the type of Documents Available Through Ecoso DATE (see Ecoso Newsletter 2/1 and 2/2).

The documents collected by Ruth and Maurie Crow over the past fifty years include books, reports, working papers, news clippings, talk-aids and, of course, a full set of the first series of Ecoso Newsletters (from 1957 to 1969). There is material on the Radical Ecology Conference, the Cosy Cottage Project, a number of campaigns on children's services, education, local government, urban energy, community participation and a significant number of "left" pamphlets from the 1930s, 1940s.

Some of the documents have been indexed in a way to suit the two users, but this is ineffective for more public use.

The collection may be launched in mid-October. A great deal of work is needed before then.

Thanks to Sheila Byard who recognised the importance of keeping the collection together. Thanks also to Margaret W. for the \$1000 to help establish the collection. There are plans for a committee of trustees which can raise some money to keep the collection up to date.

*Social Organisation for Ecological Sustainability-
Towards a More Sustainable Settlement Pattern*

Peter Newman was the keynote speaker at one of a series of seminars organised by the Melbourne City Council earlier this year.

Peter Newman is Associate Professor in Environmental Science at Murdoch University (WA) and Acting Director, Environmental Planning and Development Office of Cabinet for the Western Australian Government.

Ecoso reprints the "Abstract", an extract from the "Introduction" and the "Conclusions" of Prof. Newman's seminar talk :-

The Abstract

"The unsustainability of settlement patterns is viewed by presenting data on the growth of high energy using, low density suburbia, the loss of rural population, (particularly from village and small country town settlements) and the growth of mega cities over diverse small towns. Social reorganisation for more sustainable settlements is suggested under these three areas.

- A. It is suggested that cities need to be more urban through :-
1. Re-urbanising city centres and sub-centres.
 2. Re-orienting transport infrastructure away from the automobile.
 3. Removing subsidies on the automobile; and
 4. Providing a more public orientated public culture.
- B. It is suggested that the countryside needs to be more rural through :
1. Permaculture villages being established in depopulated rural areas.
 2. Bio-regionalism becoming the basis of local authority boundaries and responsibilities including energy production.
 3. Tree farm incentives being extended.
- C. It is suggested that diverse small towns need to be made more viable through :
1. Industrial location and relocation to small towns becoming part of sustainable industry policy whereby pollution taxes and greenhouse credits are directed to local incentives.
 2. Bottom-up economic facilitation being concentrated in small towns
 3. Environmental attractions of small towns being the focus of civic attention."

In his Introduction Peter Newman said :-

"To think of more sustainable patterns of social organization within the context of maintaining meaningful work, creativity, conviviality, equity etc requires us to think broadly and deeply... to be "renaissance people" in our breadth and spiritually sensitive in our depth. This is quite a task. As it will impinge on the central direction of my paper I would like to begin with some spiritual or at least theological background which I have found helpful in my musings as a futurologist."

Peter Newman's theological "musings as a futurologist" are a very original and inspiring way of placing our present problems in an historical, philosophical perspective.

In the concluding words of his "Theological Prelude" Peter Newman hopefully stated :- "there are choices which mean we can rebuild and recreate our present settlements with a new vision".

Ecoso space does not permit any more information from this valuable document except a full quote of the Conclusions :-

"A final word needs to be said, gathering together a number of threads from this paper, concerning the nature of the changes required for sustainability.

In the Prelude I stated that we did not need to banish cities and invent a totally new kind of ecological settlement, and that we didn't need eco-revolution and eco-anarchy.

The question then is, do we need to move towards a more regulated, ecologically oriented socialism to push our settlements towards sustainability, or perhaps we need a more market-orientated, ecologically sensitive capitalism to pull society forwards ?

"In this paper I have made suggestions on social restructuring to unblock the potential of rail transit, innovative housing, alternative energy and permaculture villages, all of which require elements that are more entrepreneurial, more free market and more flexible in the use of government regulations. Thus sustainability is not per se a question of having more intervention, more regulation, more socialism as sometimes claimed. Nor is it a case of just saying the market will sort it out, that more Thatcherist capitalism will bring the necessary changes as the present market is highly distorted towards the automobile, city sprawl, rural population decline and so on; the kind of restructuring to achieve sustainable industry and hence more sustainable settlements could only be facilitated by governments.

"What is needed most is a vision for change in our settlements and to facilitate that change we need a combination of private and public enterprise. This can be both Australian and ecologically sustainable. The examples given in this paper should also indicate that ecological sustainability in Australian settlements has at least some hope."

(my emphasis... Ecoso editor)

(Photostat copies of the whole of Peter Newman's paper are available from DATE for cost of \$3.50 including postage. DATE also has other recent reports by Peter Newman for example "Transportation Planning - Perth Metropolitan Area - To the Year 2000 and Beyond". This was Prof. Newman's keynote address to the State Conference of Local Government Engineers in March 1990. Photostats available through DATE for \$3.50. see also Ecoso 2/1, 2/2 in which there are reviews of other reports by Prof. Newman all of which are available through DATE.)

But What is Sustainable Development ?

"Sustainable development has become one of the political buzz words of our times. A phrase which rolls off the tongues of the likes of Margaret Thatcher and Graham Richardson." This is the lead-in to an article in the Tribune on May 23 in which Ted Trainor defines the concept of sustainability in a way that sits ill at ease with some of the latter day converts.

Ted is a lecturer in education at the University of New South Wales. He writes :-

"Everyone is in favour of sustainable development of course. The trouble is that none of its most vocal proponents, including Thatcher, Hawke, Kerin, Richardson and the much quoted Bruntland Report (UNO) realise that in a society based on market forces, the profit motive and economic growth is inescapably, and by its very nature, unsustainable."

Ted Trainer reminds us that "Rich countries like Australia have only one quarter of the world's population yet they are using up three quarters of the world's wealth and resources output, including perhaps 100 million hectares of the best Third World land. We average twenty times the per capita resource consumption of the poorest half of the world's people."

He criticises the Bruntland Report because it does not recognise that it is the aggregate increase in output that is responsible for the unsustainable nature of our society. It had no conception of sustainability in a finite and limited world.

Ted Trainers two key questions set by sustainable development are:

- a) what specific limited things need development ?
- b) What would constitute sufficient development ?

His answer is that the most important tasks are not to do with increasing the volume of cash sales, but the development of systems, such as caring for others and effective political system for making decisions and especially development of sustainable local eco-systems.

Similarly to Peter Newman, Ted Trainer does not look for solutions to either the conservatives who are demanding de-regulation and greater privatisation nor to the socialist who are demanding redistribution. He states that there is a third way and that is the radical conserver society. He explains part of his vision of a new type of economy in these words :-

"The new economy might have a considerable 'free enterprise' sector, in the form of many small firms and co-ops not motivated by profit maximisation. It would have to have a considerable 'socialised' sector in which some key production and distribution decisions for local communities are collectively planned by those communities.

"The new economy would also have a lot of barter, giving away of surpluses and free goods produced by local working bees, committees and rosters. The essential theme is to make the economy as self sufficient as possible."

In Ecoso 2/5 there is a chart comparing the ideas of Peter Newman and Ted Trainer. This schematic way of describing the ideas of these two well known academics, about sustainability, was presented by Drew Hutton (of Brisbane) at a Rainbow Alliance seminar last year. Here it is :-

<u>Peter Newman</u>	<u>Ted Trainer</u>
1. Medium density and urban consolidation.	1. No great concern with density and urban sprawl
2. Public transport	2. decrease in mobility
3. Strong city centre with radial networks	3. Local employment, leisure and commerce
4. Secondary sub-centres	4. Strong barter economy
5. Strong sense of local community	5. Local agric. production
6. More open space and "commons".	6. Much reduced consumption levels
	7. Local renewable energy.
	8. Local community autonomy
<u>Newman</u> has emphasis on influencing Government policies.	<u>Trainer</u> has emphasis on community education, and utopian decentralisation.

Drew emphasised that such a chart over-simplifies the two sets of attitudes and that there were many areas of agreement in practice.

"Bringing the Point Home"

Deborah White of the Department of Architecture at the University of Adelaide presented a paper at the Ecopolitics Conference in September last year. She called the paper "Bringing the Point Home". At the start she warned that she was intending to be "unashamedly and romantically polemic and populist."

Deborah explains how the "'nuts and berries' sort of environmentalism is rightly or wrongly seen as less dangerous to the status quo" (than the built environment) and that "this diverts attention from the immediate environment of urban life". She states :- "It is difficult to persuade people that the concerns of the environmentalist must extend to the built environment, but, that is where most of us are, and we are causing the damage."

To illustrate, how the built environment is not regarded as an important part of the environmental agenda, Deborah gave the following example :-

"In the original programme for the Adelaide 'Greenhouse 88' Conference in 1988 there was to have been no section dealing with the built environment, until intervention by concerned architects and planners. Is it merely a typographical error that in the programme for this conference I am listed as coming from the Department of Agriculture ? Arriving a little early to chair the workshop on 'Bureaucratisation of Environmentalism' on the first night of the Conference, I commented a little plaintively to someone about this and she said "But the environment is outside the buildings, not inside them. They shouldn't have architects talking at Ecopolitics IV."

Deborah presents some very powerful ideas to counter such ignorance. Here are some of them :-

"The house can still constitute a point of contact between the artificial and the natural environments and between people and the physical world....."

"The potential symbolic power of the house as a site of autonomous action based on knowledge (for instance of the physics and chemistry of the interaction between buildings, the technical equipment and the natural environment and the psycho-physiology of human comfort) contrasts with its use as a symbol of consumption, competition and 'prestige....."

"In fact in our home environments we still retain elements of technological sanity, the direct interaction between individual action and comprehensible consequences, which for many of us have long disappeared 'at the office' under the constraints of unopenable windows, centrally controlled air conditioning, banked lighting, muzak in the lift...."

"At home east facing windows tell us where the sun rises, north windows let us watch the sunlight reach deep into the house in winter.....sensibly located openable windows which allow cross ventilation on hot summer nights makes us conscious of the breezes....."

"At home we are immediately confronted by practical effects of our decisions, our actions or inactions. The home represents a point where the environment and money economics meet up quite clearly and manifestly The householder, unlike the keepers of our national accounts is well aware of the difference between running cost, investment and capital resources."

"These actions are in a way subversive. They allow 'ordinary' people's scientific and technical knowledge and practical autonomous actions to displace, even if only slightly, dependence on the destructive systems of the engineered city infra-structure which hooks us all into the bureaucratized cities."

And Deborah's final comment :-

In the face of the economic and political forces ranged against the natural ecology, where individual action can appear futile, and in spite of the strong temptation to despair, I would propose a glimmer of hope. The environmental impact of cities constitute the accumulation of multitudinous 'trivial' individual decisions, so it is amenable to individual autonomous action. Let us start wherever we live."

Deborah was one of the six authors of "Seeds for Change - Creatively Confronting the Energy Crisis" which was published in 1978. She illustrated her talk with ideas from this historic book.

(Copies of Deborah's paper, "Bringing the Point Home", is available from DATE for \$2.50. DATE also has "Seeds for Change" and the papers used during and after the preparation of this study including the "Nunawading Energy Study" and the North Melbourne Associations's "Less Energy with More Enjoyment" These may be borrowed from DATE.)

The Women's Charter....The Quest Applying the Charter to the Needs of Older Women

"Nothing should be more expected than old age; nothing is more unforeseen" wrote Simone de Beauvoir in her book "Old Age" (published by Harmondsworth, Penguin 1977)

By the year 2000 11.7% of the Australian population will be over 65 and a very high proportion of this percentage will be women.

"The Women's Charter" was launched in March and now the process of the "Quest" has started. In other words the ideas in "The Charter" are being further developed through discussions with groups of women.

The needs of older women were discussed at a recent Union of Australian Women gathering.

The discussion ranged over a wide field. Thanks to Edith Morgan who chaired the meeting and who provoked a vigorous exchange of ideas, and to Heather O'Connor who recorded the discussion.

The discussions showed that the over-riding concern of women is that ageing, in our society, tends to result in women being unable to have control over their own lives. The discussion raised these questions :-

How can dependency in old age be avoided ?

What alternatives are there to nursing homes ?

What is needed so that the "Home and Community Care" program really meets the needs of elderly women living alone in their own homes ?

What health services are needed to avoid ill health in old age ?

What help can older people receive to enable them to keep pets ?

Can the "Health Complaints Service" be more effective by being less conciliatory ?

Why should medical files be regarded as the property of the doctor ?

Is it possible to have a "living will" ensuring that your own wishes on treatment, accommodation, euthanasia etc are carried out ?

To relate some of these ideas to "The Charter" it is useful to consider three main inter-related issues. These are housing, health and community control.

Housing may seem to be purely a physical product, health purely a service and control purely a relationship between people; but in real life all are interconnected as can be seen from the issues listed below.

Older Women and Housing. "The Charter" emphasises that housing has a special meaning for women. In providing accommodation for elderly people this aspect of housing is rarely considered; yet it is of crucial importance.

The decision to change a dwelling place is usually taken when a woman has to face up to new problems. For example the death of the husband, a debilitating illness of the woman or some other crisis in her way of life.

Four main issues need to be addressed :-

1. The need for informed choice.... knowing what is available.
2. The need to know what sort of control the woman will be able to have over her own decisions when living in new accommodation.
3. The need to be able to easily maintain relationships with friends, relations, past neighbours and new neighbours.
4. The need for financial security, including the on-going costs of the accommodation and guaranteeing of supportive services.

Older Women and Health "The Charter" emphasises the need to develop health services specifically for women, such as community based information and support services.

Older women who are used to the traditional way health services are provided, on a one to one basis, need to be given special encouragement to use community based and self-help groups which are playing such important roles in promoting good health.

Four main issues need to be addressed :-

1. The need for special health information services for older people
- 2 The need to be informed about the treatment that is being given
- 3 The need to have some method of controlling treatment, especially treatment when consciousness has been lost.
- 4 The need for personal control over medical records.

Older Women and Community Control "The Charter" points out that women's position in society does not allow them to have an effective say about the direction of health and other services. Furthermore, the traditional way services have been provided have tended to reinforce women's isolation and powerlessness.

Women tend to passively accept what is provided. This gives great power to the "caring professions". This is particularly in evidence in some of the larger institutions (nursing homes, hospitals etc) where passivity is an asset to the management.

Four main issues need to be addressed :-

1. The need for more information about services and the responsibilities and rights of service users.
- 2 The need for a great variety of ways of helping users to participate in the management of services.
- 3 The need to recognise that supportive networks of friends and relations can help older people to feel confident in their relationships and are important communication channels.
- 4 The need for economic security.

Children's Services in the 1940s

Both the 1940 "Women's Charter" and the 1990 "Women's Charter" have section on "Child Care" and it is useful to compare the ideas in them.

In the 1940s child care was regarded as being mainly an issue for women and the need for child care was expressed from the angle of the child's needs :- "Experience has shown that the mental and physical well being of children is developed, and delinquency prevented, by the enjoyment of day nursery and nursery schools and supervised playground facilities." (from the 1943 Women's Charter). In this section of the Charter there is no mention of child care serving the needs of parents.

On the otherhand the section on child care in the 1990 Women's Charter states :- "Child care concerns all parents who want to be fulfilled in their work and home life. It is thus an issue of concern for both men and women but lack of services affects women more than it does men because our domestic arrangements are usually aranged unequally."

Research by Lynne Davis, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, School of Education, Macquarie University (NSW) is providing some useful facts for reconstructing the political atmosphere in the 1940s in which the campaigns for child care in wartime were set.

Here are a some quotes from an article by Lynne which was published in "Lilith (a feminist history journal) in 1989. The first three quotes illustrate the character of the deep seated prejudices of the period. The last quote illustrates how, despite this atmosphere, a new type of child care movement was beginning to be envisaged.

1. Early in the 1940s Archbishop Mannix argued that children were better off in their own home than in an "institution" and asked the Federal Government for assurances that -
"unless a national emergency so demand, neither creche nor any other means shall be employed which may induce mothers to cast aside their direct responsibilities in the belief that they can serve their country more fittingly by minding a machine than by minding those children whom God has committed to their care."
2. In 1943 the economist, Colin Clark, who was at that time Deputy Director of War Organisation and Industry, wrote in the Brisbane Courier Mail about "children being drafted into communal centres". He warned that this was "a vicious idea propogated by communist."
3. In 1943 the Report of the Committee of Management of the Melbourne Children's Hospital stated:-
"The child of today is the citizen of tomorrow on whom the burden of post war reconstruction will fall. Is it not important then that every attention should be given to the health of children now, so that in the future they will be able to carry that burden? Urgent though the need may be, mothers with young families are of more importance to the nation in caring for their children in their home than being occupied with any other duty."
4. In her autobiography, Jessie Street wrote about the wartime child care movement in these words :-
"War had changed conditioin considerably... old forms of institutions no linger seemed adequate. The pre-war women's organisation had been made up, in the main, of leisured women, philanthropists, a sprinkling of professional women and so on. New approaches were necessary to cope with the new conditions. Creches, kindergartens, health services and clubs for young people were of more importance to housewives and to the workers than any other stratum of society."
(See next page for an example of a Wartime Child Care Project)

This Ecoso Newsletter reprints this article which was first published in "Join Hands" in 1983. Before browsing through this article please read page 8, the quotes may help to give you a "feeling" for the period.

Child Care and the People's Front Against Fascism

by Ruth Crow

When I joined the Communist Party in 1937, I was inspired by the rallying cry of the Spanish anti-fascist woman, La Passionaria, ".... I would rather die fighting than live on my knees".

In the 1930s, joining the Communist Party opened out a rich life. There was plenty of action but also a rich cultural life with plenty of encouragement to study.

George Dimitrov's speech to the Seventh Congress of the Communist International, "The United Front Against Fascism" was published in 1935. Dimitrov's was one of the first voices raised to show how fascism enslaves women. "We must remember that there cannot be a successful fight against fascism and war unless the broad masses of women are drawn into it."

Dimitrov called for the building of a *united front* of the working class and a *people's front* against fascism. He rightly pointed out that "they are interwoven, the one passing into the other in the process of practical struggle against fascism but it is impossible to establish a genuine anti-fascist People's Front without securing the action of the working class itself, the leading force of the anti-fascist People's Front".

The *united front* was based on uniting the *working class* organisations for the defeat of fascism. The *people's front* was the *broad alliance* of the working class (united in the united front), with *other organisations* opposed to fascism.

The challenge to build a People's Front meant that political attention was given by the Communist Party to a great variety of community movements in addition to the basic working class movements such as the trade unions and the Labor Party. Women, many of whom were not in the workforce and thus not directly geared into the trade union movement, began to see how they could be part of the movement against war and fascism.

From memory, it seems that most women in the Communist Party had a very clear way of distinguishing between fascism and communism. We deplored Hitler's 3 K's for women: the kitchen, the church and the children. "The world of man is the State woman's world is her husband, her children and the house," he said.

On the other hand, Lenin described the creches and the factory dining rooms as "the shoots of socialism", pointing out that such

services were necessary if women were to be emancipated from the drudgery of domestic work. He also said that such collectivisation of domestic work provided new employment opportunities for women.

The anti-fascist war in Spain showed the tremendous creative abilities of women. In the midst of war they began to build up a new life for women and children, based on the social-work program of the Republican Spanish Government.

The fight against fascism was not only a fight against the fascists in Germany, Italy and Spain. Fascist ideas were penetrating through the western world, including Australia. This meant that Dimitrov's call for a united front, as the kernel of the people's mobilisation against fascism, was a matter of vital concern, once the nature of fascism was unveiled.

In the early 1940s the Communist Party of Australia published a report titled *Work Amongst Women* which helped women to understand the politics of the anti-fascist struggle, and how to take the first steps in leaving the home and taking part in the main political movement of that period.

THE SPECTRE OF UNDER NOURISHMENT

In the mid 1930s, together with my concern about the need to struggle against fascism, was my concern about the social problem of under-nourishment.

A report which particularly affected me was called *Food Health and Income*. It was a study by Sir John Boyd Orr (published in 1935) which showed that 50 percent of the British population had an income which would not enable them to purchase a healthy diet. Similar studies were made in Australia.¹

My concern about the causes of under-nourishment developed into an interest in the need to provide meals at workplaces, kindergartens and schools.

During the Second World War the Commonwealth government, through the Department of Labour and National Service,

established a very efficient catering service, providing very nourishing meals, at all large munition factories and some other workplaces.²

WOMEN MUST WORK TO WIN

Having a young family prevented me from participating in what seemed to me to be exciting new ways of promoting better nutrition. The exasperating situation of being out of the workforce at this important historical time propelled me into the movement for wartime day nurseries.

We raised the slogan "Women Must Work to Win" and a few of us (mostly communist women in our early twenties) set about campaigning for child care.

The first two wartime day nurseries were established in Melbourne in 1942, and another three were established in 1943. A comprehensive centre which included a day nursery and school age section was opened in 1943, and a number of half-day kindergartens extended their services to all-day care in 1943 and 1944.³ The establishment of the new-type day nurseries helped to initiate a broad campaign for federal government subsidies for child care.

In 1943 I helped to bring together a group of people who quickly established the South Yarra Day Nursery in a church hall. My children were then a baby and a two-year-old. I took the children to the day nursery every day and I was the main person responsible for organising the voluntary helpers. My knowledge of nutrition was also a valuable asset.

We had a roster of helpers from before breakfast until 6 o'clock in the evening. Some people helped regularly before going to work in the morning. There was great joy in working with a very wide cross section of people in this pioneering venture.

A very significant contribution to the program of activities for the children was made by women who had recently arrived as refugees from Nazism. These anti-fascist women had many skills in music, art,

literature, as well as knowledge about the development and the educational needs of young children.

FIVE MAIN FACTORS OF THE WARTIME CHILD CARE MOVEMENT

There were five main factors which contributed to the new types of children's services being established in Melbourne in the early 1940s.

1. **The Women's Movement.** Wartime increases of women in industry developed a broad women's movement called the *Council for Women in War Work*. This was a coalition of professional women's organisations, women in the forces (WAAF, WRAN, AWAC and the Land Army) as well as the trade unions (Teachers' Union, Clothing Trade Union, Munitions Union, Food Preservers Union and other unions with large numbers of women members).

2. **The Wartime Day Nurseries.** These were a completely new type of children's service. Previously there had been kindergartens and institutional-like creches. The new centres provided care from 7.30 am to 6 pm and a rich cultural and educational program. The running costs of the day nurseries were met by contributions from the parents. There were many voluntary helpers, mostly mothers of young children, although people of all ages also assisted.

An organisation called the University Women's Patriotic Fund played a significant role in this day care movement. These women provided finance for equipment and rent, and gave considerable encouragement to the young radical women who were the mainstay of the day to day voluntary helpers' roster.

Some members of the WUPF were strongly anti-fascist and were active on the Council for Women in War Work. These people were strong advocates for federal funds for child care.

This linking of people and organisations around a common cause was typically part of



Ruth Crow

the people's front against fascism.

3. **The Committee for Co-ordinating Child Care in wartime.** This group consisted of representatives of the established children's service organisations, the Council for Women in War Work, the Teachers' Union and other unions, school organisations and the new-type wartime day nurseries.

There was a considerable clash of values on this committee. The differences revolved around the philosophy that "the child's needs are paramount" and that "we must not make a need for child care". Thus, the traditional child care organisations (Free Kindergarten Union, Lady Gowrie Centre, Victorian Association of Creches) were strongly opposed to mothers being in paid employment. On the other hand, the experience of these organisations was a

valued asset in many ways. Nevertheless, the example of the new-type war nurseries (and later the Brunswick Children's Centre) broke down some of the fears that these people held about the wartime day nursery campaign.

4. The Election of the Federal Labor Government. When the Curtin government was elected in 1941, it established a section on children and working mothers in the Commonwealth Department of Labour and National Service. This office was located in Melbourne and a representative from this

department attended the meetings of the Committee for Co-ordinating Child Care in Wartime and gave considerable encouragement to those associated with the development of the new-type day nurseries.

5. Radical Movements in the Localities. In the 1940s, the Communist Party had bookshops in a number of suburbs, some trade unions had local branches in some suburbs, there were local anti-war groups. The Housewives' Association and the Mothers' Clubs were active around some social problems. In

Brunswick Nursery, 1943



addition, people tended to have a greater sense of belonging to the place where they lived and many people worked close to their home. All these factors contributed to the formal and informal formation of networks between organisations and individuals. In practice, the basis for a people's front movement existed in many areas.

THE BRUNSWICK EXAMPLE

In September 1943 the Co-ordinating Committee for Child Care in Wartime was successful in lobbying the federal government for funds for a comprehensive children's centre. This centre was planned to provide care for babies, pre-school and school age children.

In September 1943 I was appointed as the Secretary-Organiser of the Brunswick Children's Centre and had the task of bringing together the local people and organisations to establish this unique venture.

The existing kindergarten and day nursery were part of the scheme and had to be co-ordinated with each other. The hours at the kindergarten were extended to all day care. In addition, a school centre had to be established to provide for the school age children.

It is impossible to recapture the exciting new relationships which developed through the Brunswick Children's Centre: the links between people in local organisations, and the links between people in the Co-ordinating Committee and the people living and working in Brunswick.

Brunswick was regarded as a pilot scheme and the future development of the federal government's day care program was to be based on the Brunswick "experiment".

By the end of 1943 the Co-ordinating Committee for Child Care in Wartime had convinced the federal government of the viability of such schemes, and a number of half-day kindergartens were extended to full day care.

In Brunswick in the 1940s, there were large textile, rope and clothing factories employing

thousands of women. Holeproof, for example, employed over 1,000 women and the main product was parachutes. Brunswick was chosen as the place for the federal government's first comprehensive children's centre because of this high number of women in the workforce.⁵

The centre was financed by the federal government, the state government and the Brunswick Council, and the cost of the day-to-day running expenses was paid by the parents. There was a committee of management of local people, mainly users, and a representative of the Co-ordinating Committee for Child Care in Wartime and the Brunswick Council.

FOUR FEATURES OF THE BRUNSWICK CENTRE

1. The Involvement of Working Class Helpers. The Brunswick Centre and the other wartime day nurseries involved working class women as their main voluntary helpers. Traditionally, children's services (kindergartens and infant welfare centres) had relied on voluntary helpers but these were nearly all recruited from the more affluent suburbs and were mainly older women. Lenin said, in describing the "shoots of socialism", that creches and so on are a form of collective household providing one of the first steps out of the isolated domestic drudgery.

Exciting new forms of organisation were developed in the collectives at the Brunswick Centre and at the other wartime day nurseries.⁶

2. Linking Up With Main Political Campaigns. There was a linking up of the efforts to provide children's services with the need to support the main political campaigns of that period of history: the defeat of fascism, both at home and abroad. The natural local links described under the heading of "radical movements in localities", provided the frame work for the children's centres to become part of a loose coalition in the localities.

3. Strong Links Between Home, Work Place and Children's Centres. Most of the mothers

and some of the fathers worked at factories within walking distance of home and the children's centre. Some shift workers helped at the centre in their free hours.

Some unions were very visible at the local level, not only through local branch meetings of the AEU and the BWIU etc, but through social and sporting activities such as girls' basketball teams.⁷

4. A Vision of the Future. In retrospect we seemed to have had a very simplified picture of what the future could provide. Mainly our picture was of very concrete services: buildings, equipment, etc, but we also did

have ideas on better human relationships.

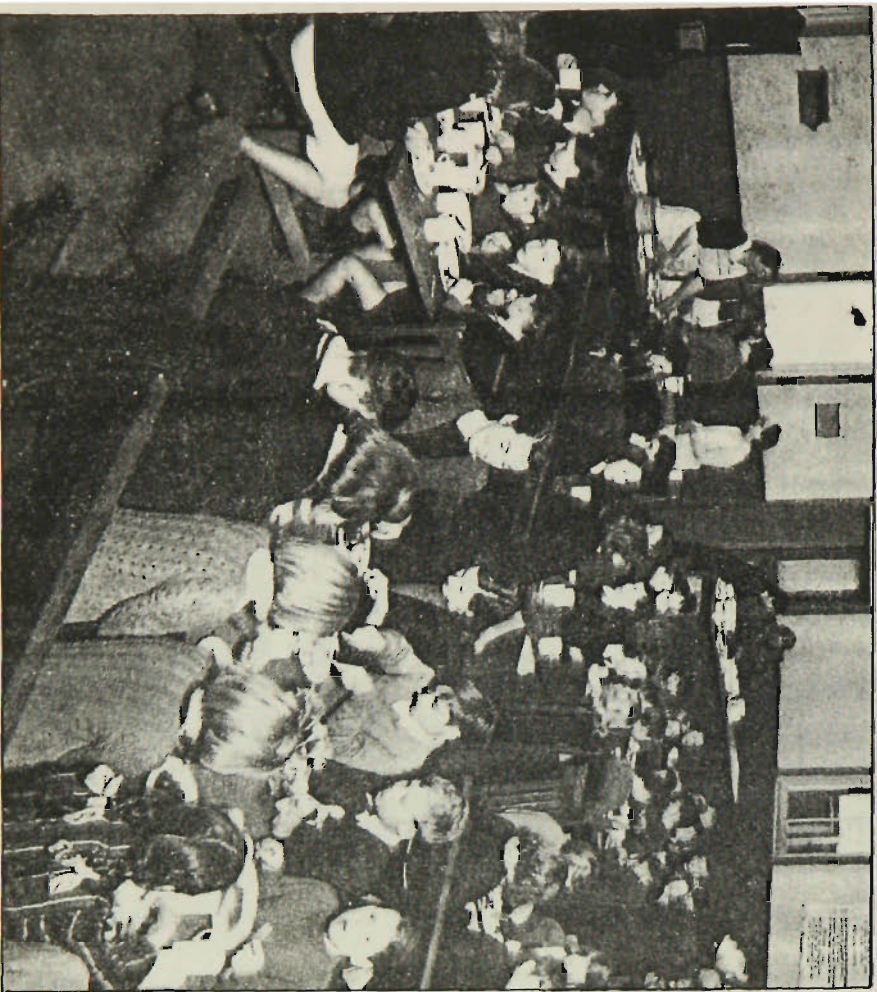
The Brunswick Centre was not unique in this utopianism. Concrete plans for post-war reconstruction were very popular with a variety of groups, not only in Brunswick but throughout the population generally.⁸

In the mid-1940s, the Brunswick Communist Party produced a party program for Brunswick which gave details of a post-war plan for the area.

WARTIME CHILDCARE DISMANTLED

The Brunswick Centre was hailed as a

Brunswick School Centre, 1943. School meals, after-school and holiday programmes were subsidised by the Federal Government.



success and used as a model for establishing a number of day nurseries. But there was no other centre that provided such a comprehensive program: caring for babies, toddlers, pre-schoolers, and school age children and involving users and other people in the locality. Before such complex centres could be universalised the wartime children's centres were dismantled.⁹

1. The 1944 Federal Government Referendum. The loss of the referendum meant that when the war ended the federal government no longer had powers to fund such services.

2. The 1944 Preschool Act of the Victorian government initiated a scheme or subsidising preschool education services (not child care) on a do-it-yourself basis of matching funds. This resulted in state government funding being directed to more affluent areas and the relative deprivation of areas in the north and west of Melbourne.

3. The matching grant system meant that the main emphasis on children's services was on money raising and men dominated the newly formed preschool committees. This meant the end of the innovative collective way of working that women had developed in the wartime centre.

4. Discouragement of the day care centres increased in the 1940s. The Victorian government's policy was to provide services only for those in dire need.

A post-war organisation called the Day Nursery Development Association did succeed in re-establishing some of the wartime day nurseries in their own buildings (most buildings were for wartime use only), but gradually these reverted to half-day kindergartens.

5. The "Cold War" anti-communist witch-hunts resulted in those who were communists or "thought to be communists" being expelled from children's services committees and other community organisations including school organisations.

6. The pressures towards privatisation of the family increased with rapid suburbanisation,



Ruth's daughter, June, rests at the extended hours kindergarten, 1943.

home ownership, private transport by car, resulting in the break up of local networks and the development of consumerism.

Brunswick suffered from all these factors and, in addition, there was a rapid deterioration in council politics with red-baiting becoming the main political objective of some councillors.

In the early 1950s the left throughout Australia was diverted to defensive action around the Sharpley Commission, the Petrov commission, the referendum on the legality of the Communist Party, and a number of political frame-ups, as well as attacks on wages and working conditions.

THE UNITED FRONT AND THE PEOPLES FRONT IN THE 1980s

The lessons learnt in the 1930s about relationships between the united front and the

FOOTNOTES:

people's front were not fully applied to the political situation in the 1950s and 1960s. It was only in the seventies that the left began to shed its defensive sectarianism and to recognise the new forces for social change that were developing.

Also, the union movement was now expanding beyond its industrial working class base to include white collar and professional workers.

Unlike union organisations, many of these social and environmental movements are, to date, fragmented and frail. The task of communists is to draw the threads together. This cannot be done without a vision of the future, and part of presenting that vision is the actual day to day example of developing human relationships on the job and in the community.

The CPA Program, *Towards Socialism in Australia*, has rightly drawn attention to the crucial importance of community control.

"Voluntary organisations would supplement and reinforce 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."

For the 1980s, the Communist Party needs, as a general political goal for such broad fronts against the capitalist corporations, alternative plans for improving life for the working people: a social wage for all, that embraces the idea of creating community and community control in all aspects of life.

1. See *Food and Health — A Study of Nutrition in Australia*, edited by Marjorie Coppey, Left Book Club, 1941. I assisted Marjorie with this publication and my name is listed in the credits.

2. Now, when so many workplaces have canteens, it is not generally realised that before the Second World War, the amenities at the workplace usually did not include a lunch room, let alone a canteen. I happened to be one of the first people to try to establish a factory canteen. In 1937 I was employed by a very large textile firm as a manager-nutritionist. This firm had the slogan "Let your daughter work at for her health's sake!", and gave a considerable amount of publicity to the fact that they were establishing a canteen. However, the management told me "to feed them mince meat and make a profit"

In contrast, the Commonwealth Department of Labour and National Service established canteens which served really nourishing meals that were cheap and efficiently served in comparatively pleasant surroundings. In wartime there was considerable concern about the health of workers.

3. See *Australian Women at War*, edited by Mollie Bayne, Left Book Club, 1943, in the section "What Facilities does Australia Provide for Married Women Workers?". This includes a brief description of the new-type day nurseries.

4. In Victoria creches were established in the inner industrial suburbs in the 1980s. These were very like orphanages and were used by only the most poverty-stricken families. Their main emphasis was on hygiene and care and not on the education of young children.

The kindergartens in Victoria started before 1920 and were mainly in the inner area. These centres provided a rich educational program but, as they did not approve of mothers being in employment, were only open for half day sessions.

5. See Thelma Prior's article "My Forty Years in Industry" in papers from the Second Women and

Labour Conference, 1980. Thelma worked at Holeproof during the war. This factory was within a quarter of a mile of the Brunswick Children's Centre.


6. We not only collectivised housework through child care and school meals, we enjoyed our leisure together at picnics and dances. We learnt together by visiting other centres; and we popularised what we were doing and helped other groups of people to meet together to set up a centre in their own locality.

7. See Thelma Prior's article, op. cit. She refers to some of the off-the-job activities of the Holeproof workers. These activities were locally based and included people who worked in the area and who lived in the area. "We formed a basketball team.... We had community singing in the Brunswick Town Hall ... We used to go to the country on weekends and pick rose hips and haws and crush them for Vitamin C for the troops", and so on.


8. See *We Must Go On*, "A study of planned reconstruction and housing", by F.O. Barnett, W.O. Butt and F. Heath, published in 1944 with an introduction by the Director General to the Ministry of Post War Reconstruction.

9. "The Communist Party has had some experiences in leading campaigns around the needs of our children, but in the period immediately after the second world war much of our work in this sphere suffered from three weaknesses. Firstly we did not make it clear that it was the government not "charity" which must be held responsible for every phase of social services. Secondly, the mass organisations of the working class were not mobilised to raise the political demands against the government, nor did we conceive of any other form of organisation than a locality committee of individuals. Thirdly, and above all, we did not clearly see the effect of war preparations on social services." Article by myself, titled "In Defence of our Children", in *Communist Review*, No. 117, Sept. 1951.

By the way, the silhouette, illustrating the "School Centre News" was by Ailsa O'Connor who was teaching at Brunswick Girls School in the early 1940s. (see ECOSO 2/9).



SCHOOL CENTRE NEWS



No. 3

JULY, 1944.

BRUNSWICK CHILDREN'S CENTRE School Age Section

Chairman: Mr. C. C. Fisher.

Hon. Secretary: Mr. S. Chambers.

VICTORY WILL BE OURS

June, 1940. Nazi armies sweep through France and drive British forces from Dunkirk.

June, 1941. Hitler's armies invade Soviet territory.

Treasurer: Mr. R. Pile.

Secretary-Organiser: Mrs. Ruth Crow.

HATS OFF TO THESE WOMEN

Stories of how the helpers carry on their work at the School Centre would fill a large volume. The following stories are singled out as side-lights on the lives of all these women.

One mother of six young Australians con-

