Checked, edited and updated 2024-12-23 against photocopied version by Jack Gilding and Beverley Snell. Footnotes added by Bev and Jack.
Original is undated but appears to have been written before the move to 21-23 Smith Street. For more recent history see the Walker* Press homepage.

Autobiography of 20 Smith St.

by Beverley Snell

In 1971 after the demonstrations against the South African Springbok teams being allowed into Australia, there was significant feeling in the community that there should be ongoing education to keep people aware about what was happening really in South Africa.

About 20 people came to a meeting at the Australian Union of Students (AUS) all saying they were interested in being part of such a movement. Brian Havenhand was then the Abschol (Aboriginal Education) director at AUS and it was through him that AUS facilities could be used. It was decided that it was necessary for any entity to be kept completely separate from AUS and Africa Research and Information Centre was formed.

We contacted all sorts of people we thought might be interested like Victorian Council of Churches, (Rev Sandy Yule and others), remnants of old anti-apartheid groups, United Nations groups and more.

Everyone contacted agreed that such activity was a good idea and necessary and so we started out to see what had to be done.

It very soon became obvious that almost everyone in the general community was totally uninformed and also that there was absolutely no material available in Australia about Africa from the point of view of an African. Not only was South Africa neglected but the whole continent was only covered from the point of view of the colonialists. There was no hope of us being able to completely rectify this situation but we decided that although our main aim was to show people what was really happening in southern Africa, we would do our best to help who had queries on any aspect of any country in the African continent. There were people in our community who had specialised knowledge on relevant areas and it was up to us to find them, and to read as widely as we possibly could.

A real problem was the lack of printed material on South Africa. There was no money so we weren't in a position to buy material from overseas and our overseas contacts had no money so they weren't in a position to give us free material. They only thing we could do was to reprint their material ourselves. We could use AUS facilities up to a point. We had to provide the paper, and not interfere with the AUS schedule for printing their own priorities.

We managed this was for a while. Jak Gilding was the printer at AUS then and he was very helpful. He was particularly interested in getting involved with community education and other social issues than working for AUS. He wanted to print material concerned with his interests and did so on much the same basis as we did - using the equipment. Jak did our printing for us.

There were so many drawbacks and most of the people who had indicated initial interest disappeared. Then during 1972 a printing machine sort of fell across our path. It would cost $450 and I happened to have that much money at the time so we acquired a printing press. It was a Multilith 1250. The press was set up in the back shed at 24 Margaret Avenue. Montmorency. Jak had to go all the way out there and all the auxiliary things like platemaking[1] had to be still done at AUS. This was inconvenient to say the least and made things rather slow. I learned to print and we struggled on. Jak had given up the AUS job and was taking bits of printing for other people who had enough money to pay him a bit, so that he could live.

Paper was scrounged from universities, AUS, Victorian Council of Churches, but was never enough. It was easier to go to work in the area I was qualified (Pharmacy) to pay for paper than to try and get it in other ways.

By this time it was 1972 and the elections were imminent. There was a lot of groups needing printing to be done and some had people who were capable of using the machine, or had other auxiliary equipment so that we didn't have to rely all the time on AUS (15 miles away) but it was all pretty uncertain.

The first really big high pressure thing I did was for the 1972 election when Margaret Briggs[2] was standing as a candidate for the Casey electorate against the Minister for Environment, Arts and Aborigines, Peter Howson. Jak and I printed 15,000 very full leaflets on the neglect of Black Australians under Peter Howson and others and then they had to be circulated in Casey. Barry Pittock (a draft resister and Quaker activist) and his family did one end of the electorate (he lives in Aspendale) and I with my kids did the other end.

After that we kept on slowly adding drops to the ocean. The fact that there was no-one else who still seemed to be interested in the initial project didn't make much difference. I was very involved personally and emotionally and there was no way I could just stop.

In March 1973 we heard that we were to be honoured by tours in Australia of two ZANU[3] leaders … at very short notice. Nobody in OZ knew anything about Zimbabwe except those who were committed to the untruth so there was plenty to be done. First of all we had to print a basic booklet of conditions leading up to the Pearce Commission[4] and the formation of the African National Congress (ANC). So Simba[5] learnt to print for the occasion. We spent easter printing this booklet

[1] Platemaking involved photographing the image to be printed onto a special paper surface. The image appeared as a look black powder image that could be 'tidied' up with a magnetic instrument before being sealed onto the paper (the plate) with a 'sealer' machine. The plate was then fixed to the printing machine and picked up the ink - transferring it to the printed page as it rolled through the machine.

[2] A Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Woman

[3] The Zimbabwe African National Union (**ZANU**) was a militant socialist organisation that fought against white-minority rule in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia)

[4] The Pearce Commission was a British commission set up in 1971 to test the acceptability of a proposed constitutional settlement in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe).

[5] Simbarashe Mumbegegwe was a Zimbabwean student at Monash University representing ZANU.

and packed it up and sent it to Sydney for collating, stapling, etc by Sekai Holland[6] and friends. We couldn't get any enthusiatic helpers here. For paper we literally begged, borrowed and stole... including borrowing from Watsonia Army camp. The printing didn't stop at that booklet, there were others, and information sheets, letters, and all sorts of other things to be done and there was not enough time to spend much time working elsewhere for money for paper.

Simba and I organised meetings for these two ZANU people, went to the meetings, met the press, delivered material over the place, met planes, and saw them off, and prepared and printed material and put it on freight planes mostly in the middle of the night. After that I went overseas for about 4 months because by then there seemed to be a growing interest in things Southern African and needed to contact people in UK. The theory was that if I wasn't there someone else would take over. But they didn't.

By the time I returned there were lots of little groups all over the place that had received government grants from the Schools Commission for example, or AAP[7] or other bodies. This situation meant groups had enough money for limited expenses but not enough for using commercial enterprises. The printing press had been moved to 804 Brunswick St and Jak was doing quite a lot of printing for these people. This development meant that he didn't have to stay on the dole and waste time working outside when jobs came up. He lived on $22 a week and accumulated enough money from printing to be able to add to the auxiliary equipment.

Walker* Press had evolved because in order to be able to charge people for printing we had to be a registered business. The name Walker* Press was chosen to represent the Phantom walker who went around at night stamping out evil wherever it was found.

Jak went to auctions and acquired the necessary equipment to make us self reliant. Typewriters, guillotine, platemaker, etc at phenomenally low cost. He was given a grant so that *Education Subscription Service* could get off the ground. All the contact with other bodies was our main source of support. I joined onto other anti apartheid groups as they came and went - often there was nothing much happening. The Friends of the Earth, other environmental groups, education groups, local community action groups, etc that we did printing for included the people who brought in stories of outrageous misunderstanding about southern Africa, Aboriginal issues and other issues they came across; and they took out information with their own material.

There was a growing interest and a growing number of requests for information but not much interested in helping. We had developed contacts with people in other states and had a lot of contacts overseas so there was news coming in all the time and we tried to get this news to people who were interested as it came. We made a lot of contacts during the ZANU tours and didn't want to lose them. The contacts included for example the Unions, church groups, schools.

Early in 1974 one Lyndon Shea appeared on the doorstep of 804 Brunswick St. He was a retired teacher interested in REAL education and thought Jak might like some help with his work. Jak wasn't in a position to pay anyone for working for him and said so. But Lyndon didn't mean

[6] Sekai was a Zimbabwean activist living in Sydney - married to Australian Jim Holland
[7] Presumably the Australia Assistance Plan.

working for money so he joined the operation. He brought with him Caroline who also joined the team. Lyndon was very helpful concerning Southern Africa issues and also had a number of helpful contacts.

Soon after this the African Freedom Movement sprang up mainly from the universities but all the other bodies like AWD[8] and individuals connected including John Roberts and others, Retrieval[9], the Victorian Council of Churches (VCC) with Barry Pittock all collaborated with us.

Ms Putuse Appolus from the Namibian Women's League and a representative of SWAPO's[10] Youth League came and went in 1975 and the African Freedom Movement died. So we all went back to our ongoing struggles. All the involved groups had always cooperated and referred people to each other as necessary and shared our information and contacts. Meanwhile one Steve Reid from Canada, a friend of Lyndon, had appeared on the scene. He needed no preliminary education before being let loose on the public and as well being absorbed into Walker* consolidated enterprises. He performed admirably in the field during and ever since the SWAPO tour. Other residents from Lyndon's household had been co-opted so it was much easier to go further afield with the messages in less time.

Things had built up and at times it was almost possible to get things done.

NEVILLE CURTIS had arrived in Australia. He was an exiled South African - former president of the South African Union of Students and anti-apartheid activist. He linked to the church based groups and the Canberra based Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA). He wanted to continue anti-apartheid activities and before exploring the range of groups already active in Australian states he launched CARE (Campaign Against Racial Exploitation) as a sort of umbrella anti apartheid group. The existing groups did come together and support the movement. Walker* Press became responsible for producing and printing CARE Newsletters that were distributed Australia wide.

By this time WALKER* CONSOLIDATED ENTERPRISES was a formidable body that could almost cope with the demand. But the demand grew and the human resources didn't so the workers were back working night and day to satisfy the ever growing need. Schoolkids who came to visit and almost all groups whose printing we did were intimidated one way or another into spreading the word. (Mostly in return for spreading their words.)

Then there was a civil crisis. Owing to unsatisfactory human relations WALKER* CONSOLIDATED ENTERPRISES were forced out of 804 Brunswick St in May 1975. The move was to 20 Smith St. The change that this made was incredible. We had moved into the same area as Amnesty International, International Development Association (IDA), three or four different Aboriginal bodies, the Student Christian Movement (SCM), Australia China Society, Community

[8] A church mission group based in Napier Street Fitzroy

[9] *Retrieval* was an education publication concerning justice issued that was compiled by the group in Napier Street Fitzroy

[10] South West Africa People's Organisation

Aid Abroad (CAA), Brotherhood of St Laurence as well as being in a very available geographic position.

The phone began to ring eternally with requests covering every sphere of activity from Chile to Women's Movement to Multinationals. Friends and relations o workers became involved and Nicola Snell and Paul Gilding were (almost) forced to cooperate. They answered phones, filled orders, collated, stapled and went to demos, phoned out messages... everything. We couldn't have managed without them (but they say that because of that they failed 5th form).

But we just can't manage. The information just keeps coming in, has to be read, assessed, catalogued, reproduced, parcelled up. It goes out quicker than it can be reproduced. People just come in all the time with requests for information for school projects, for papers they are producing regularly, just because they want to know, because they are doing in depth studies on particular aspects and we have accumulated so much material. Caroline has accumulated vast resources on Aborigines and we are constantly be called on to use these.

Also we just get odd bods with 'problems'...legal, personal, political, far too diverse to describe. And nearly all this CARE gets credit for.

It is getting too much. Nicola has always come to the rescue and is now learning to print (artwork also a speciality). Rob Wallis (a housemate of Lyndon) has learnt to print so he can just about be left alone to do it and he has always been helpful with the running around delivering, etc. particularly. But there's so much and unfortunately we aren't all there all the time and the ones who are there have to do everything.

Mike and Helen[11] know what its like to be trying to write something and end up being a receptionist, advisor, message taker and salesman instead.

So if anyone else wants to be one of these diverse things this is the place to train.

[11] Mike Parsons and Helen Hill (connected to the Napier Street church groups)