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Ecoso Exchange Newsletter

Ecoso 2/22, October 1992

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Enclosure Invitation to the Crow Collection Spring Picnic at the Living Museum of the West, lunch time on Sunday October 11.

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News from the Crow Collection

The Royal Australian Planning Institute of Planning has recognised the contribution the Crow Collection is making to planning by awarding Sheila Byard and Christine Carolan an "Honourable Mention in the Community Planning Category" of their 1992 awards. The citation was for the project on the History of Children's Services in the Western Region.

The project was nomination for an award by the Sunshine International Women's Committee which was supported by the Sunshine Working Women's Centre. The Crow Collection Association would like to thank Gwen Goedeke and the other Sunshine women who supported her in making the nomination.

A reminder to Ecoso readers that the Association still has copies of the video (\$15 plus \$5 postage) and the twelve booklets (\$2. each or 12 for \$20 plus postage).

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Have you checked your address slip ?

A number (23), (24), (25)... marks the serial number of the Ecoso when your next subscription will be due. Eg (23) = sub due after Ecoso 2/23.

An asterisk * means you are on the complimentary list, but a subscription would be appreciated. This list includes those who give special help to the Collection, or have an exchange arrangement with Ecoso, or who may be receiving Ecoso for the first time.

The letters ND indicate that your subscription is NOW DUE.

The letters OD are a warning that your subscription is OVER DUE, please pay your subscription or your name may be deleted from mailing list.

Ecoso subscription form is on cover page.

VCE and Energy
The Social, Political and Environmental Issues
in a Local and Global Context

In the Crow Collection there is a number of books and other documents on the production, distribution and use of energy. More importantly the Collection has working papers, written by community organisations, on the social, political and environmental issues of energy use in the local and a global context. For example the book and the working papers for "Seeds for Change - Creatively Confronting the Energy Crisis". This 500 page book was awarded a Victorian Government Energy Award in the mid 1980s.

For the past couple of years, one of the authors of "Seeds for Change", John Dick, has been a project worker for the Energy Action Group which has an Information Centre in Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane Melbourne.

John, who is a member of the Committee of Management of the Crow Collection Association, first met Maurie and Ruth Crow in 1975 during the Radical Ecology Conference (REC). As a result of REC John and Maurie and several others worked together for several years to research and write the book "Seeds for Change" and later to apply some of the findings of the report to two Melbourne municipalities. The books, the publications (Australian and overseas) they used and the working papers the group wrote during this 12 year period, are in the Crow Collection.

Illustrating Implications of Human Issues

"Energy Action" is the name of the newsletter of the Energy Action Group. In its Winter issue there is an article on "VCE and Energy". Ecoso Exchange has been given permission to reprint it. Here it is :-

The year 12 students undertaking VCE Chemistry are covering energy as their topic for their Common Assessment Task (CAT). Energy Action Group (EAG) has been requested by a number of students and teachers for information on a broad range of energy issues. EAG has also been of assistance to students through talks.

Whilst we have addressed the chemistry component EAG has emphasised the social, political and environmental issues in a local and global context.

Students are increasingly being required to illustrate implications of human issues that are often neglected in broad assessments. Issues to consider when looking at energy production and use include : reliability and consistency, employment acceptability and importantly affordability and equity.

These last two issues are at times in conflict with other factors. EAG argues that energy must be reasonably priced, so that all families within our society can afford to access this essential service. This is extremely important as the wealthiest 10% of society spend only 2.5% of their income on energy costs, while the poorest 10% spend 18% of their income on energy cost. If the energy service is not affordable many people will experience and suffer from a situation called fuel poverty. That is they will be unable to afford the minimum amount required to provide a comfortable standard of living, often resulting in health problems.

The notion of affordability also dictates the type of energy source that we as a society use. For example if Victoria were to adopt a policy of only providing solar or wind power as a means to generate electricity the price per KWH would be 300% higher because of the upfront costs. Thus resulting in many people being unable to afford the service.

The Notion of Equity

There is also the need for energy services that are provided by a society to be based on the notion of equity. Firstly, the EAG argues that the energy service offered needs to be available to as many people as possible within society. That is those living in the country should have access to the same standard of service as those living in the city.

Secondly, and of concern to our organisation at present, is the notion of similar tariff rates across similar customer classes that is the cost need to be the same for all. Although infra structure is costly to the utilities the present system of uniform tariff (which is currently under threat) ensures that country dwellers are not penalised.

These issues underpin the energy issue and highlight the fact that energy shapes the society we live in and any changes have the potential to affect society.

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The phone number for the Energy Action Group is (03) 650.2923. It is located in Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane Melbourne 3000. The Crow Collection documents are in Room 409 at the Footscray Campus of the Victoria University of Technology. More information about the Crow Collection by phoning (03)688.4754 or (03) 380.1876 (AH).
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Federal Government's
National Electricity Strategy

The Federal Government has recently released a discussion paper outlining their position on the formation of a national electricity grid.

The Energy Action Group has many concerns about the proposals as outlined in the discussion paper. Two of these are :-

1. Many domestic and small commercial and industrial energy consumers will be required to pay more for their electricity, while "other" commercial and industrial customers will be paying less.
2. All rural customers will be paying more for their electricity compared to those living in the cities.

Thus the strategy fails to recognise consumer and community concerns and the impacts the proposed policy will have on those within our society who can least afford it and those who are living in rural areas.

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Copies of the report on National Electricity Strategy are available from Tim Mason, Department of Primary Industry and Energy, Canberra. Phone (06) 277.7480.
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Sound Town Planning

The Age editorial on Saturday, September 5th, praised the Victorian Minister for Housing, Andrew McCutcheon, for rejecting the proposal to build a huge office block in the suburb of Holmesglen. The new buildings would have provided office space for 2000 workers.

The decision is consistent with the Government's policy to confine office developments of such a size to the city.

As Andrew McCutcheon and Evan Walker (a former Minister of Planning) will be retiring from State politics on October 3rd it is timely for Ecoso to thank them for their contributions to planning and housing, not only as members of parliament but in the community movements of the 1960s and the 1970s.

Compact Cities

Urban Development in Victoria 1992 -2031

Will the Dream Come True ?

"A Place to Live... Shaping Victoria's Future" is the title of a report which was launched by the Minister of Planning and Housing (Andrew McCutcheon) in April this year.

Here is the summary of Minister McCutcheon's vision :-

"A Place to Live" is a strategy to create more livable urban communities, promote ecologically sustainable development and achieve a better balance of resources and opportunities between Victoria's regional centres.

Such a paragraph in an official report is a good starting point for popularising the aim of a compact city. The task now is to select those principles which can be used by the community movement as guides to action. Here are some of the main points from the Victorian Government's urban policies:-

Ecological sustainable development will be virtually impossible unless we halt suburban sprawl. In compact cities the need for, and cost of, travel are reduced, encroachment on agricultural land and significant habitats is avoided, the variety and affordability of housing is increased and public transport is more attractive.

The Victorian Government will encourage and support local initiatives to develop residential intensification strategies. Land development infrastructure subsidies that encourage wasteful and uneconomic development will be phased out. Widespread adoption of minimum residential densities of 15 dwellings or more per hectare in growth areas will reduce the demand for land and attention will be given to other creative ideas and initiatives for maintaining housing affordability. Tighter controls on rural residential development will be introduced, preventing development in remote unservicable urban fringes.

The principle of urban consolidation will be embodied in strategic plans for all urban settlements. Well planned neighbourhoods should encourage walking, cycling, and public transport for shopping, recreation and minimise the number and length of car trips.

Better management of demand for infrastructure will include the further extension of beneficiary pays principles and community education programs to change user behaviours in the use of resources. Urban development will be planned in regard to capacity thresholds for key infrastructure and facilities. This is also critical to the implementation of urban consolidation. Management systems and procedures to coordinate infrastructure will be developed in conjunction with local government to cover areas outside metropolitan Melbourne. These will provide land release for urban development in line with infrastructure capacity and availability. The possibility for further private sector investment in public infrastructure will be explored. There may be scope in this way to advance the provision of necessary expensive infrastructure identified in strategic planning.

In Melbourne and all regional centres, vacant or under-used sites with existing services and infrastructure (Docklands, Jolimont, industrial sites in Footscray) will be redeveloped. Policies will give priority investment in these locations rather than in un-serviced land. The Victorian Code of Residential Development, as it is applied to the subdivision of land will be implemented in Melbourne initially then gradually throughout all major urban areas of the State. This will enable a wider range of affordable housing in safer and more livable neighbourhoods.... A wider variety of housing choice in existing urban areas will be pursued through the extension of the Victorian Code of Residential Development to cover multi-dwelling development, this will build on the success of the Dual Occupancy Provisions.

A concluding paragraph of the report is a warning :-

If current trends and ways of doing things do not change, our problems will magnify and our future prospects will decline. We have a choice. We can choose to, act and achieve the future we want, or we can forsake a vision and just let things happen.

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Housing Dilemmas for Elderly People
by Ruth Crow

In a few week time the Swedish planner, Per Olov Nylander, will be visiting Melbourne. He will be speaking at several seminars on housing for elderly people. Here are some random ideas about retirement villages in Australia.

Unlike the Scandanvian countries, the majority of Australians do own their own homes. Therefore Mr Nylander may be interested in these view on how home ownership is creating some insoluble dilemmas for eiderly people.

There are three issues that concern me, especially in regard to "age specific" retirement villages. They are :-

1. "Asset Rich and Income Poor"
2. "Fear of Devalued Equity"
3. Ethno-Specific Housing Estates

1 "Asset Rich and Income Poor"

The contradiction between the use value and the exchange value of home ownership mainly affects us when we are about to sell our home. Most of our lives we are only interested in the use value of our dwellings, on the other-hand the estate agents and developers are only interested in the exchange value of real estate.

This contradiction makes it difficult for older people to find accommodation which more effectively meets their changed needs. Today the "asset rich" elderly people are being courted on all sides by those who make a profit from the exchange of real estate. We have only to look at the "Business Supplements" in the Age to see how the investment industry regard retirement housing schemes as a very profitable.

A large proportion of the men and women now in their sixties, are likely to have set up their first homes in the 1950s when there was rapid suburbanisation based on cheap land in the outer suburbs and the cheapness of the family car. Today, this is the "asset rich" generation.

Forty years ago they were the "teen generation" that was courted by all sorts of frumpy advertising to spend, spend, spend. They were the first "consumerist generation". Today, because of their "asset riches" they are being courted by the developers and estate agents to invest in elaborate retirement dwellings, often in large retirement villages where they are mainly dependent on car transportation. Thus exacerbating urban sprawl, forming ghettos of people of the same age (and probably the same ethnicity and the same income group), robbing the general community of the presence of elderly people.

2. "Fear of Devalued Equity"

The "asset rich and income poor" generation are being thrown to the mercy (or rather lack of mercy) of the housing market. They are, justifiably, worried about the possibility of the devaluation of equity.

Those living in retirement villages have good grounds for this fear. The generation, a bit younger than they are, are not going to be so asset rich. An increasing proportion of those now reaching fifty years have had to face relative poverty because of unemployment in the family. They may not be in a position to buy the "retirement homes", when they come on the market again. at the price that is equitable for the current purchasers.

3 Ethno Specific Housing Estates

When we talk about ethno specific housing we tend to think of housing for people from non-English speaking backgrounds. But, in reality most of our retirement villages are "ethno specific". Most of the people in them are white Anglo/Saxon/Celtic origin and in some there are pressures to conform to a life style acceptable to a specific religious belief.

Ecoso 2/22, page 7.

The age-segregated retirement village type of housing does not seem to be very attractive to migrant families. In the future, the increased number of elderly migrants in the population could result in a significant proportion of the elderly population (for example, people of migrant origin) rejecting the life style resulting from clustering homes for older people on large housing estates. The potential number of purchasers seeking village type retirement homes may be reduced. Home owners in retirement villages may well suffer from devalued equity.

Some Ideas

These three dilemmas are social issues, they affect everybody's daily human relationships. The solution to them lies in measures to increase the use value of home tenure and to decrease the exchange value.

An over concentration on exchange value results in unnecessarily shifting from home to home, as if this will solve the social problems which emerge at different stages of life. This form of consumerism is encouraged by those who make profit from selling houses.

Here are several practical suggestion on how to give greater recognition to the use value of our dwellings, whether they are rented or owned.

1. Strengthening the sense of belonging to a neighbourhood, especially by enhancing the role of local government in providing decentralised human services with shop front information centres. Cultural activities, such as festivals and other such convivial occasions for social mixing are also important in strengthening the community networks.
2. Encouraging community participation and community information at all levels of government so that people can help to plan the housing, services and infrastructure which are necessary in the urban areas where they are living. Opportunities for community involvement (and therefore being able to make informed choices) would reduce personal stress on housing problems. Such stress is often exacerbated for aged people, especially those who are faced with making decisions in a crisis situation..
3. Constructing houses which can be more easily altered, for example making greater use of prefabricated modules for walls and cupboards so that living spaces can be altered according to changing needs. Such building methods would enable single dwellings to be more easily adapted to dual occupancy and the floor space of flats to be changed to meet the needs of those dwelling in them. Such ways of adapting floor spaces are commonly used for offices and factories.
4. Changing tenure legislation to give owners and tenants more security. Since last century Australia has pioneered forms of tenure, for example the Torrens Title. Tenure legislation should ensure that rates of interest are more equitable.

Finally a quote from Frederick Engels :-

A house is prevented from becoming capital if the owner lives in it, just as coat ceases to be capital the moment I buy it from the tailor and put in on.

Urban Planning in Finland

A Report on Tapiola, 1965

In 1967 "Irregular", the forerunner for Ecoso Exchange, published an eleven page article on "Planning, Management and Administration of Tapiola" by Heikki von Hertzen, President and Planning Director of the Finnish Housing Foundation. The Finnish Housing Foundation began planning and building Tapiola, as complete town in virgin country in 1952. In the late 1960s Tapiola lead the way, in the Western World, on many planning issues. These extracts from the 1967 report are republished to supplement the information about planning in Scandinavia which is being made available through the recent planning study tour in which Sheila Byard was a participant (See Ecoso 21).

Heikki von Hertzen's report is now nearly thirty years old and he is describing ideas which were put into practice forty years ago. So, as you read these extracts, try to imagine what would have been the prevailing ideas in Australia. Here are the extracts :-

The "Right Surroundings"

The starting point in the planning of Tapiola was more than just a house or "housing". It was the all-important aim of creating the right surroundings for the town dweller... creating a milieu that would be both socially and biologically correct... was to be realised and all other planning related to it... a town dedicated to home life, leisure and recreation... traffic was not to predominate ...it was to submit to restrictions and only to serve the inhabitants. We realised that if we wanted to achieve these aims we should not let the density of the population grow too big. The maximum was set at 26 people per acre and that meant that the planned area of 600 acres could house 17,000 people.

"As Many Jobs as Possible in Tapiola"

The planners of Tapiola have from the beginning tried to get as many jobs as possible for residents of Tapiola, either within its own territory or in its immediate vicinity.....The industries of Tapiola must not create nuisance or disturb the residents. For the most part the enterprises in question are run by electricity

"A Vital Town Centre"

But dwellings and work places do not alone form real community. In addition a vital town centre, an attractive one, is needed. At least considering the Finnish circumstances, I think it will not be possible to point out activities, essential to a prosperous community - at any rate not many of them - that would not be represented in the centre of Tapiola after it is completed.

"Three Independent Neighbourhood Commercial Centres"

Beside the administrative, cultural and business town centre, there are three independent neighbourhood commercial centres, each designed to serve approximately 5000 to 6000 inhabitants. The planners also wish to locate food shops within a radius of about 250 yards measuring from each individual dwelling. To provide this convenience food shops have been placed outside the main commercial centres.

"Traditional Building Methods"

Most of the houses have been built by traditional methods, but prefabricated "element houses" have also been tried out. Much attention has been devoted to details of interior decoration.... considerable closet (cupboard) space is provided....all houses are coupled to the remote heating network.

"A Real Cross Section Community"

We have also wanted to plan Tapiola as a real cross section community where a university professor, a skilled worker and a successful business man can live and feel happy side by side. And this has been done.... great differences can be accepted.... At the present time 55% of the inhabitants of Tapiola are supposed to be "white collar people" and about 45 % "blue collar people". It has often been apparently hard for foreign visitors to believe that such a considerable number of people from low and middle income live in Tapiola and that this has had practically no influence upon the appearance, the cleanliness the level of culture and the spirit of community.

"Practical Problems of New Town Development"

Heikki von Hertzon's report includes information on "Practical Problems of New Town Development". Here are some quotes :-

"Many a Hard Struggle Was Fought"

It was very difficult to get the building engineers convinced of the fact that when making a street or laying the foundations of a house, the surrounding nature must not be violated and tree must not be cut down unnecessarily. Many a hard struggle was fought in this respect.

"A Paper of Its Own"

This community which was started from scratch had no basic population to perform the task of integration. It received inhabitants from different walks of life, therefor it was realised from the beginning that various adjustment difficulties might occur. Community relations work was therefore started in good time, even before the first inhabitants moved into Tapiola. The community has a paper of its own "Tapiola today", published weekly by the Housing Foundation. Copies of the paper are delivered free of charge to all dwellings.

The Magnitude of Urbanisation

The magnitude of urbanisation the world faces is enormous and we must prepare for larger tasks.....so research continually has great tasks to do.I think that in every country at least 5% or maybe 10% of the total investments in building activity, should be devoted to unprejudiced experimental building of new communities. In the long run this is the only right way.

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A full copy of this 11 page, 1965 report on Tapiola is available from the Crow Collection Association for \$1.20 (this includes postage).

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Urban Planning in Sweden

Sheila Byard (Hon Sec Crow Collection Association) spent most of July studying urban planning in Sweden. In preparing for the visit she compiled a brochure of documents on Swedish cities. This included an article by Melbourne planner, John Morton.

John, who was on this tour had worked in Sweden from 1949 to 1952, 1954 to 1960 and, for a long stretch, from 1962 to 1970. On his return to Australia he worked for the Melbourne City Council.

Here are some quotes from John Morton's article.

Quotes from Introductory Paragraphs

The boom culminated in the years 1965 to 1974 when a million dwellings were built, in accordance with government policy, for a population of eight million. It is remarkable for a democracy to maintain continuity in a program of this size over such a long period, but by 1965 the Social Democrats had been in government with a policy of social reform for a third of a century. It had proved difficult to increase the supply of housing to meet the demand while maintaining competitive levels of industrial investment and a tolerable level of consumption. Private export industries were recognised as having an early claim on investment funds and Sweden's continuing industrial strength has vindicated this policy. Housing investment between 1961 and 1966 was 21% to 24% of gross national investment.

Migration to the cities was not the sole cause of urban housing shortages: space standards had been traditionally low because construction to resist heat loss is expensive, Sweden has negligible fossil fuels and buildings must be heated eight months of the year. As prosperity increased after 1950, traditional space standards became unacceptable and households grew less populous. Price control was a further powerful influence on demand. Rent controls had been introduced during the Second World War and remained in force for decades in some cities. Housing was allocated on the basis of need rather than ability to pay in those places where supply and demand were not in equilibrium. Rent subsidies were available to ensure that children grew up well housed.

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Such was the position in 1963 when I first became personally involved with the design of large housing estates in the employment of the biggest co-operative housing organisation, HSB. As an introduction I was given the task of assisting the architect of a town plan for about 800 dwellings.

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...While the (Swedish) Building Act gave local government control of the "how" and "where" of urban building, the "when" was found to require municipal ownership of land in order to ensure orderly urban expansion and economically rational provision of utility services.

...Monopolistic tendencies became evident. Financial, material supply, land-owning and construction firms integrated "vertically" and "horizontally" into huge combines.

John Morton's Concluding Paragraphs (in full)

The control of land in large parcels is an obvious prerequisite both for successful physical town planning and for rational production of housing. While this was once the preserve of the privileged few, for example, tyrants or aristocratic land owning families such as those that built the Georgian Squares of London, Edinburgh and Dublin.

Sweden now uses this power democratically through municipal ownership of land. Australia by contrast, has diffused land-owning power down through the social hierarchy by fragmenting land ownership with the consequences that it is then impossible to optimise the layout, design and construction of capital investments in towns. Ineffective investment in towns denies capital to export industries and arguably, affects Australia's competitiveness in urban products.

The Million Program demonstrated that, while it is possible to apply scientific methods to the design and production of housing to satisfy functional goals, this may not satisfy the expectations of occupants once their basic needs have been satisfied. Some dissatisfaction with the residential environment so created may be attributable to social causes and some to unfamiliarity, but rationalisation of housing production provides few opportunities for the individual occupant to shape his/her immediate environment, either to provide a setting for the role he/she aspires in his/her fantasy or to play among his/her peers, or simply to satisfy his/her creativity.

The line of communication between housing consumer and producer becomes very attenuated when the design and production of housing is controlled by large organisations. In the Swedish housing debate of the day, the voice of supply was strong and confident, tirelessly quoting figures. The voice of the demand side was hesitant and weak, citing statistics without conviction because numbers inadequately represent individual preferences.

Local monopoly of supply is likely to occur when projects of thousands of units are built by huge consortia that have exclusive production methods and have sought and acquired a monopoly of available land.

The absence of feudalistic attitudes to land tenure makes modern Swedish planning possible. The principle that a tenure "in fee simple" of a minute suburban allotment in Australia carried a similar privileges in law to those of the baron with "a fief" of a county once enjoyed in England inhibits optimum use of land and efficient housing. A quarter acres autocracy was absurdly out of scale in the Middle Ages and it still is, but now for industrial rather than agricultural and military reasons ! In a competitive world it is doubtful whether any nation can afford not to mobilize and use its limited resources as rationally as its planning skills allow. Sweden perhaps has shown us a path that we all have to tread, though it would be wise to heed the lesson that big business is not easily subverted by community representatives.

(John Morton's article includes graphs and tables and, very importantly, a list of about 50 references. There is a full copy of this 1986 article in the Crow Collection at the Victoria University of Technology, Footscray).

The Determined West

Pen Portrait of George Seelaf

I see life to be enjoyed and for enjoyment it's necessary to be appreciative and reactive in the arts field. There is a great sense of fulfilment in creating and there is a great sense of fulfilment in enjoying the arts. We can all learn to be appreciative of the works of artists.

These were the words used by George Seelaf in 1981 at Trades Hall Council Seminar on "Art, Education and Recreation in the Work Place".

George, who died 1988 was a Trade Union Official in the Meat Industry from 1943 and was State Secretary between 1948 and 1973. In Victoria he introduced the arts to union members by a variety of means. For example, he encouraged unions to commission short stories for their journals. He organised May Day Art Exhibitions on the Yarra Bank and inspired artists to develop cartoon skills through designing union banners. On a national level he helped to establish the Mary Gilmore and Henry Lawson Awards for short stories. These awards were later widened to include poetry and novels. In 1951 he was one of the key people who was brave enough, to risk a serious libel action by publishing Frank Hardy's "Power Without Glory".

From 1976 to 1981, after his retirement, he worked as the Trades Hall and ACTU Arts Officer. He explained his enthusiasm for this work :-

The point is that because our education system, because of society's philosophy that we are educated for work, the bulk of workers have been denied the opportunity of ever being exposed to many of the art forms. They see films on TV and that is about it. The Trade Unions, by taking art to the work place, is giving an opportunity to this section of the community to be exposed to art, given the opportunity of appreciating and in many instances participating in an art form. I just don't see this happening in factories only, but in suburban shopping centre malls when mum comes out of the house to do the shopping which to many is a social occasion because of the isolation of the house.

In 1973 George was elected Chairman of the Western Region Committee on the Ageing and through his work, craft was introduced into every elderly Citizen's Club in the nine municipalities of the Region.

Some of George's other activities were as part-time field officer for the Community Arts Board in the Northern and Western Region of Melbourne, an executive member of the Library Promotion Committee of Victoria, and Chairman of the Footscray Committee for music.

In 1976 George Seelaf was made a Member of the order of Australia (AM) for his services to the community and the Trade Union Movement.

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You can find out more about George Seelaf, his friends, neighbours and work mates when you visit the Living Museum of the West on October 11. Invite your friends, neighbours and workmates to come to the picnic too.
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