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# ECOSO EXCHANGE NEWSLETTER

No 2/25, April 1993

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This Ecoso is mainly about local government, town planning and housing.

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## News from the Crow Collection

The second Annual General Meeting of the Crow Collection Association was held on March 30th. Twenty-five people attended. Following the meeting there was a forum on "Local Government in the Last Quarter of the 20th Century ". Most of those present had some involvement in local government.

Some of the guest speaker's talk is reproduced on page 2 of this Ecoso. A full transcript or tape of the talk is available from the Crow Collection if you send a stamped addressed business envelope to the address on wrapper.

The meeting room was donated by the Footscray Council and the Deputy Mayor of Footscray (Marie Earle) was present. Apologies were received from Joan Kirner, Mayors and Councillors of Melbourne, Williamstown and Brunswick Councils as well as a number of individuals.

The University of NSW held a Planning History Seminar on March 13th. Sheila Byard and Ruth Crow attended this. There is a report on the seminar on page 5 of this Ecoso. Ruth presented a paper "Maurie Crow and the History of the Town Planning Research Group".

A letter from Peter Higgs in Vietnam has been received. Peter will be on our overseas mailing list for a few years while he is studying politics and economics in south East Asia. In his letter he says he went to an International Women's Day function "It seemed a little like mothers day in our country" he wrote.

### Local Government in the Last Quarter of the Twentieth Century

Jenny Wills, Director of Social Policy for the Municipal Association of Victoria was the guest speaker at the Annual Meeting of the Crow Collection Association which was held on March 30th. Here are a few extracts from a notes taken during her talk :-

The essential element of local government is community development. It is about quality of life. This role was encapsulated in local government legislation in 1989. The Victorian Local Government Act of that date stated :-

The role of local government is to facilitate and encourage appropriate development of the municipal district in the best interest of the community.

This is what local government is on about - with varying degrees of success.

In 1984 there was a Federal Advisory Council for Inter-governmental Relationships (which no longer exists, unfortunately) It published a report that concluded that the basic aim of local government was :-

To be informed and responsible for decision making which develops the community and its resources To be a responsive provider and co-ordinator of public services at local level. To be a catalyst, initiating local effort and to represent the community to other governments and society.

There have been Australia-wide changes in the functions of local government. Victoria has always provided more human services than other states and we still do. For example :-

1. More social services at the local level. In 1947 South Melbourne City Council appointed the first municipal social worker By 1971 there were 13 municipal welfare officers spread across the state. Now, in 1993, there are 10,000 people employed in the local government human services, a quarter of the local government work force.
2. Our municipal services are supplied on the universal principle and there is no stigmatisation attached. This is not so in other states. If we remove these services they will not be replaced.
3. In addition to serving their own particular municipality the people employed in local government human services, in Victoria, are making a significant contribution to social policy, particularly by developing practical examples of integrated planning

Early in the 1980s the Prime Minister (Mr Hawke) strongly advocated integrated planning. Initiatives were taken by the then Federal Minister for Local Government, Margaret Reynolds to work with the Australian local Government Association which developed a number of projects around Australia which resulted in 3 concepts :-

1. Planning based on local need.

2. Negotiated agreements on funding.
3. More flexible funding.

These proposals received agreement across services. It is now recognised that local government needs to work co-operatively with central government. If we are to progress, the 3 tiers of government; Federal, State, Local and regions and sub-regions need to work with the community and that councils themselves need to be run in a corporate way.

Local Government needs a vision. Today words such as corporate planning, performance indicators and compulsory competitive tendering are used as if they were ends in themselves. Such discussions need to be turned around so that they are seen within the context of the goal of local government. That goal being the greatest social good which is facilitated by participation.

The vision needs to recognise the streams of planning at local government level, land use, infrastructure, transport, community and housing, recreation which are all part of community life... the quality of life.

Physical land-use planning has been out in front for many years. That is not good enough ! We need a whole picture !

Federal Minister, Brian Howe, is on the right track, helping councils to work co-operatively with the Commonwealth through allocating funds for 60 trail blazing projects on health, social housing and economic development.

Whole new ways of developing services are being pioneered. for example in the three areas of housing, economic development and health :-

1. Housing for low income people and people with special needs and so on is now being provided by local government. This has partly been the result of the National Community Housing Program. Five years ago local government housing was practically non-existent. Integrating housing and planning is much easier now that Councils are more directly responsible for some housing.
2. Economic Development at local government level is closely related to community development. The days are gone when councils sought large enterprises to locate in their municipality. These programs are also funded federally.
3. Health is now provided by local government as health promotion. In Victoria there are exciting new development in projects on the "New Public Health".

Local government is now relying much more on its own resources. This is despite the fact that so many new types of funding are being provided by the Federal Government For example, in 1982/83 28.7% of local government finance was from central governments funding. Now only 20.3 % comes from that source. This means that local government is becoming more independent and relying on its own resources.

An issue which must be addressed from now on is : How inclusive is local government ? To date municipal representatives have been from the mainstream of the population. Women, non-English-speaking people and people with disabilities are under represented.

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In the discussion which followed Jenny's speech the main issues discussed were :-

1. How to make local government more inclusive. Jenny explained that recently there has been a partnership between local, state and federal governments as regards services for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. The Municipal Association of Victoria has agreed to appoint a Aboriginal person to implement this policy.

As regard women, the experiences of women establishing federally funded municipal children's services had resulted in a number of women standing for local government. But if funding goes mainly through the States this gainful experience is likely to be lost.

2. Amalgamations, such as proposed in Geelong could lead to a loss of participatory democracy. The outcome of amalgamations may make local government more powerful and may threaten the state. A main issue is to look at how best local functions can be carried out.
3. There is a move away from universal provision of services with the current emphasis on competitive tendering. This is an area which needs much more public debate.
4. Policy making should be the responsibility of elected representatives. There is a current trend for municipal officer and government public servants to be the policy makers and the elected representatives are not directly involved in this and thus do not feel the same sort of responsibility for the policy changes.

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#### Local Solutions to a Global Problem

An example of how Local Government responsibilities are changing.

The Energy Park Technology is our gift to future generations. It represents the utilisation of a "renewable" energy source and simultaneously eliminates a serious environment problem.

The 37 hectares Sunshine Tip is located in old quarries. It has six and a half million cubic feet of garbage deposited in it. That is roughly the equivalent of four complete city blocks of twenty story buildings.

The Energy Park will be using gases from the garbage to fuel generators which will in turn feed electricity into the State Electricity Commission power grid. Feasibility studies show that useful gas generation will be maintained for twenty years. The City of Sunshine will be earning revenue from the sale of electricity. The Park is being constructed by private enterprise with support from with support from the Sunshine Council.

## Planning History Seminar

### A Network of People

As a result of the Planning History Seminar which was held at the University of NSW in March this year a start has been made on collecting essays on Australian planning history.

The keynote address was given by Prof. Gordon Cherry from the University of Birmingham who is the Chair of the International Planning History Society. He referred to the network of people who were participating at the seminar. This was born out by the list of participants which included historians, geographers, architects, landscape architects, engineers, librarians, lawyers, and municipal officers from all over Australia.

Robert Freestone, from the School of Town Planning at the University of New South Wales gave the following definition of planning history.

Planning history is primarily concerned with elucidating the origins, meaning and impacts of planned intervention on landscapes, laws, and communities at scales from the small precinct through the metropolitan region to the national urban system. As a fledgeling field of historiography, it can perhaps be situated between urban and environmental history - a broad territory where the primary focus is on the interrelationships between society, space environment and the state.

The seminar was organised with forums and specialist sessions which enabled nearly 40 speakers to present papers. Some of the titles were :-

"The capital city design theory and debate 1890 to 1910",

"The operation and work of the Melbourne Metropolitan Town Planning Commission 1922 to 1930"

"Creating a new Sydney 1900 -1930",

"A South Australian New Town 1950 to 1965",

"The Taylors, Sir Charles Rosenthal and Protofascism in the 1920s",

"Gordon Stephenson and the Planning of Perth".

The three papers at the opening session explored the nature, meaning and context of contributions to planning by 4 individuals. These were Augustus Alt who came to Australia with the first fleet; Walter and Marion Griffin who promoted radical alternative to the Australian suburb in the 1920s and 1930s; and, Margaret Feilman who established the first qualified Western Australian planning practice in 1950 and "who concentrated on planning as a three dimensional exercise to achieve the best use of the land as part of a total environment".

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Ecosos 2/25, page 6.

The papers from the Planning History Seminar will be published by the University of New South Wales. Ecoso will inform readers when they are available.

In the meantime a paper prepared by the Crow Collection Association for the seminar, "Maurie Crow and the Melbourne Town Planning Research Group", is now available for cost of postage and paper \$1.00. The TRG was a small, informal, ginger group which brought together trade unionists, urban activist, planners and municipal councillors from 1967 to 1980.

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Flash Back to 1970  
Uni. of NSW Centre of Environment Design

In 1970 "Irregular" the fore-runner of "Ecoso Exchange" welcomed the initiatives taken by the University of NSW to establish the "A Centre of Environmental Design" with the aim of "encouraging students to become aware of human relationships and human needs on a universal basis".

In a leaflet published by architectural students it was stated :-

A World wide crisis exists in the relationship of man and his modification of the environment and the consequences in ecological terms. The effect of deteriorating environments are of significant consequence to the well being and happiness of individuals and the relationship of people."

The students criticised the new building housing the School of Architecture, stating :-

Apart from poorly conceived planning, it fails technically in respect to lighting and acoustics, is wasteful; with unusable but lavish lobbies, creating artificial barriers between staff and students of various levels ... the building is technically and environmentally a hopeless failure.

What is it like for students and staff twenty three years ???? !!!!

Subscriptions to Ecoso and Crow Collection

If ND or OD is on your address slip your subscription is now due.

Please send \$10 to the Crow Collection. C/o Department of Urban and Social Policy, Arts Faculty, Victoria University of Technology, Box 14428 MMC, GPO, Melbourne 3000. Subscription pays for 7 copies of the newsletter.

While Sheila Byard is on study leave the phone number for the Crow Collection is (03) 380.1876.

### Housing Transport and Urban Form

During the 1990s the Federal Government has been preparing a National Housing Strategy. Fifteen booklets have been prepared and in addition there are three discussion papers.

The fifteenth booklet is on "Housing, Transport and Urban form" and it has been prepared by Peter Newman, Jeff Kenworthy and Peter Vintila.

The report uses data from 32 global cities and has used earlier Housing Strategy Reports eg "Housing location and access to services" (publication No 5) "Urban form and development strategies, equity environmental and economic implications (publication No 7) and "The findings of housing and Location choice Survey : an overview" (publication 11).

The paper points out that Australian cities are much more car based than European or Asian cities and that this results in urban problems which are difficult to solve if faced in a piecemeal fashion :-

A more systematic and comprehensive urban systems approach is needed if the issues are to be addressed adequately.

The following information gives some indication of the thoroughness of the reports. It has 22 tables, 24 figures, 10 pages of bibliography and three appendices on how the data was collected

Each chapter in the report is prefaced by a quote from a significant person. Here are two of them :-

The unthinkable is starting to be thought. In some places we are running out of space, also out of air, - fresh air and fresh water. The thoughtlessness of our approach to housing, the squandering of valuable virgin land and the social stress that distance and inaccessibility imposes on individuals, is now emerging as major problem in our national life. (Prime Minister, Paul Keating 1991)

Urban form which lead to reduced calls upon infrastructure provisions, such as urban consolidation, the location of employment close to population and transport nodes, and other forms of compact urban development, need to be given more serious attention than they currently receive. (Deputy Prime Minister, Brian Howe, 1992)

The report assesses new technologies and developing technologies to see how they may affect urban form. It points out that some technology will continue urban sprawl and that others are likely to facilitate urban concentration. In one of the conclusions of the report support is given to one of the earlier Housing Strategy booklets which recommend changes to the urban system that would move us to a less car based urban form.

The general strategy proposed are the options that could lead to a more efficient, sustainable, equitable and livable city.

Thanks, Peter Newman, Jeff Ken worthy and Peter Vintila ! You have made so much information easily accessible to lay people despite the constraints of preparing a government report.



### The Future Direction for Housing ?

Sean McNelis is the author of a Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) working paper on "Social Housing". It is available from VCOSS, 290 Wellington Street, Collingwood 3066, phone 419. 3555. Its definition of Social housing states :-

Social housing is forms of rental housing which are financed, owned and managed in ways that ensure this housing meets social objectives and social obligations.

The Inner Urban Regional Housing Council (IURHC) does not endorse this definition because there is no distinction between public housing and other forms of community housing. The IURHC definition states :-

Public housing is owned by or under the full proprietorship of federal, state or local government; it is available exclusively for rental accommodation; occupied under a tenancy agreement which establishes rental on the basis of capacity to pay; and rented with guaranteed tenure for the duration of the tenants need.

The IURHC report is called "Submission to the Industry commission into Public housing". It was published in February 1993 and is available from PO Box 625, Carlton South and its phone number is (03) 663. 8199.

The social housing policies outlined by VCOSS and also by the National Housing Strategy publications list the forms of social housing as :-

Public rental housing (owned and managed by State Housing Authorities),

Community managed housing (owned by State Housing Authorities),

Local government rental housing, (owned and managed by local government)

Community owned and managed rental housing (owned by community based corporate structures and managed by community-based management groups).

Community owned rental housing (managed by State Housing Authorities).

VCOSS applauds the provision of a range of choices stating that :-

Social housing has the potential to develop broader support for increasing the commitments from Commonwealth and State Governments. By focusing on the objectives of social housing rather than on who owns the stock, we can provide a more solid base for public sector involvement in housing and assess the range of models currently put forward by both current State and Commonwealth Government, the National Coalition and other groups.

The IURHC does not agree that social housing would achieve these aims :-

The consequences would be a long term transformation of public housing into a housing option only for the disadvantaged minority groups. It entails increases in private ownership and increased private funding. Its development is at the expense of public housing.

### Behind the Facade

"Behind the Facade" is the name of the photographic exhibition of the 1930s slums which is now on display at the State Theatre in St Kilda Road.

The photographs are from Oswald Barnett's collection and the commentary is by Bill Russell. Such an exhibition pays homage to Os Barnett, describing him as the person who single handedly abolished slums and set up the Victorian Housing Commission. His contribution to slum abolition is well documented in the photos he took, the articles published in the daily papers, the books he wrote and the reports in various church publications about the work he was doing in the 1930s and 1940s. (Footnote 1)

However, alongside of the campaign described in the exhibition notes there were other groups working for slum abolition. These were the Tenants Leagues which existed in most of the inner suburbs of Melbourne. Very few documents about their campaigns are available today. Their members did not have the skills and political influences of Os Barnett, but they did achieve some progress. (Footnote 2)

One of the most active of the Tenants League was in North and West Melbourne. Ecoso subscriber, Leila Mullett, who now lives in Brunswick was a member of this organisation and so to complement "Behind the Facade" here is some information from Leila.

I joined the Tenants League in 1943 and my first responsibility was to train myself as a "court advocate". Court advocates were housewives and shift workers who could attend the Fair Rents Court in the day time to help tenants with their appeals. We were trained by solicitors to do the job.

The Tenants Leagues played a significant role in establishing the Fair Rents Courts. We expected tenants to be mainly bringing cases for reduction in rent but in practice most cases were to ensure repairs to the dwellings.

The League campaigned for a Housing Commission and prepared plans for a site which they thought should be redeveloped.

The League also took up, social welfare issues such as the need for child care and as a result of this campaign the first municipal kindergarten was established in North Melbourne.

The League gave practical help to elderly people by renting a ten roomed house and sub-letting the rooms at 4/- a week. There were really no places for older people except the Benevolent Homes, so this was one of the first efforts at what today may be called "social housing".

The Tenants Leagues played a big role during the Second World War. We organised the Air Raid Precautions (ARP) and were also involved in making every street a "War Savings Street" by selling war savings stamps at 6d each which then became a loan for the war effort. We also learnt first aid and dug trenches at the schools.

Leila believes that one of the lasting results of the various housing campaigns in the 1930s and 1940s was the confidence men and women gained through the dignity of achieving together what it was impossible for one person to do alone.

The abundance of publicly accessible information about Os Barnett's contribution to housing is in sharp contrast to the few crumpled documents which have survived from the Tenants Leagues.

This illustrates why the Crow Collection is worth while. A large proportion of its unpublished documents are about the grass roots movements on child care, housing, transport, and other social movements. The information in these documents is not available in the mainstream archives.

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### Footnotes

i. Some books by Os Barnett are in the Crow Collection, including "We Must Go On" and "The Slums are Still with Us". All of the publications for which Os was responsible were very well presented, with photographs, charts and other pictorial material.

He was concerned with the exorbitant rents charged stating :-

In 1936, rentals of houses within certain slum pockets gave landlords returns as high as 130 % on valuations of the homes from the State Land Tax Department.

From January 1936 to December 1936 there were 2,213 evictions in Victoria.

The following quote is from an address by Os Barnett to the Council of Churches in the mid 1930s :-

The only solution to the slum problem was to take the people out of the slums, otherwise the revolutionary forces of Communism would urge them to do it for themselves. Two thousand unemployed gathered on Collingwood every week and listened to Communists who offered them something while fortunate people offered only sole destroying dole. (!!!!!)

2. A few, very few, documents about the Tenants Leagues are in the Crow Collection. These are a minute book, a petition about removing the skin sheds, a letter about child care, some notes about cases to be brought to the Fair Rents Court. Here are descriptions of two of these houses :-

Weatherboard house of 4 rooms, wind and rain comes in through the cracks near the door and window, walls and ceilings are cracked, putty loose, no copper, no troughs, no water inside, rat infested.

Four roomed brick house at 15/- a week. All rooms damp, rat infested, vermin infested, electric light in two rooms, no laundry, no bathroom, no indoor water.

Geelong Environment News

Ecoso supporters in Geelong have put the Crow Collection on the mailing list for the Newsletter of the Geelong Environment Council (GEC). Here are a few extracts from their March issue.

400 housing sites at Anglsea would destroy national heathlands which are listed on the Register of the National Estate. It would also affect the integrity of the Great Ocean Road between Anglsea and Aireys Inlet.

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The high salinity levels of the Barwon River caused by inflow of water from Lake Colac could be detrimental to the native fish and platypus in the river and certainly has caused loss of red gums and erosion of the river banks.

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The Winchelsea Council is proposing a sub division of 105 lots in Erskine Road, Lorne. The density of housing will be extremely destructive to the the existing bushland flora and fauna and is unacceptable in the context of Lorne with its significant ecological and tourist values.

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Discussions are taking place to work out a solution between the State and Federal Governments regarding the future of the Cape Otway Lighthouse.

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Consultants have been engaged by Vic Road to conduct a study into landscape treatment of the various entrances to Geelong. The worst feature of the plan is the proposal to use exotic palm trees (and some conifers) at various places along the route.... palms bear no resemblance to local vegetation and do not give a sense of "place" which bears any relationship to the Australian character or the beauty of Geelong. These palms range in price from \$1000 to \$5000 each, which in our view, is an appalling waste of money which could be much better spent in planting degraded waterways.

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The Geelong Environment Centre has a video on "Preserving Native Grasslands" which can be borrowed by community groups.

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Corio Shire as well as successfully identifying and documenting the ecological values of Point Wilson - Avalon have been innovative in proposing alternative land managements option which will not conflict with important wildlife values. This is in stark contrast to the State Government's proposals to establish a hazardous chemical storage at Point Wilson. The Shire has nominated this area for a National Estate Listing.

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A community forum on Safer Chemical Storage - Coode Island, West Point Wilson was held on March 29th. The March Newsletter of GEC had a great deal of material, on the problems of storing chemicals.

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The new terminal for the proposed Queencliff ferry will require an extensive sea wall to be built and a filled area for a large car park. The effects of the sea wall on the flow of sand around Port Philip Bay is unknown. The ferry will be twice the size of the existing one. The service will not increase.

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And there is LOTS LOTS more in the GEC Newsletter ! The GEC address is Box 693 P.O. Geelong, 3220 and the phones are (052) 43.6340, or 22 3033.

100 Years Ago !  
A Woman Who Disdained the Broomstick Waist

Mrs B. Smyth had a health shop in Errol Street North Melbourne from 1870 to the end of the century. She has been described as "Tall, muscular, well developed, with a perfect disdain for the broomstick waist."

She sold a wide range of birth control devices as well as more orthodox medicine. She advertised her talents as a "medical electrician" and "delineator of character - adaption to marriage a speciality". She was a feminist, free thinker, phrenologist, eugenicist, self taught reformer, birth control advocate, suffragette and political campaigner.

She campaigned against baby farms, infanticide, rape, prostitution, and the chronic ill health of working people. She argued that steady work, better housing, birth control and wide dissemination of practical sex information would combat these evils.

Her convictions led her to become involved in a number of controversial campaigns, for example, in 1889 she was courageous enough to plea for mercy for Bella Ferguson who was accused of murdering her baby by drowning it in a water tank. "The seducer escaped calumny" she claimed.

In addition to her family and shopkeeping responsibilities Mrs B. Smyth lectured throughout Melbourne and the larger country towns. The newspapers of the day reported attendances of 700 to 1000 at her lectures. She illustrated her lectures with diagrams (sometimes referred to as "French diagrams") and she used a human skeleton as a lecture aid.

Some of her lectures were published and sold for 6d. Sales of 1000 copies a month were recorded. Most of her booklets included diagrams of female reproductive organs. Here are some titles she used :- "The Limitation of Offspring", "Woman and How to Train Her", "What Makes Women Sick", "Love, Courtship and Marriage", "Stirpiculture (Breeding and Eugenics)".

In her lectures and writings she argued that women should be trained from an early age to understand themselves and should be taught anatomy and physiology and their influence on life and happiness. As an enthusiast for eugenics she used an agricultural metaphor to describe how attention to good seed, good soil, proper sowing and correct cultivation could produce a fine human crop. She challenged :-

And, if from the crab apple could evolve the noble pippin, how much more can humankind improve ?

And here are two other quotes :-

We cannot expect doctors to impart their knowledge for it would materially lessen their income.

Women must continue to agitate for their political rights until they have a voice in the making of laws so that all may have a fair share of land, air, water and all the things calculated to make a happy life.