

The LAA supports Peter Rabbit

Readers will probably be aware of the recent decision of some members of the Inner London Education Authority to rid themselves of books that were sexist, racist or portrayed middle-class values. Among the many books that failed the test were *Peter Rabbit* (a middle-class rabbit evidently not redeemed by his continuing feud with wealthy farmer Mr McGregor), *Jane Eyre* (you may have regarded her as a courageous and spirited heroine but falling for a strong type like Rochester must have ruled her out), *Oliver Twist* and *King Lear* (never mind who wrote them, they're racist!). Also a lot of books went just because they were more than ten years old — judged by those standards we'd be left with very little to choose from.

The LAA felt this was a news item on which we were well equipped to comment and a press release was sent out. This got excellent coverage in the daily newspapers, as well as radio mention.

The text of the press release follows:

LIBRARY ASSOCIATION DEFENDS PETER RABBIT

The Library Association of Australia (LAA) has come to the defence of *Peter Rabbit*, *Robinson Crusoe* and other children's story characters following reports that the books have been banned from school libraries in London for alleged racist and sexist overtones.

'Whilst it is important that parents and teachers be aware of sexism and racism in children's literature, books such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Tom Sawyer* and *Jane Eyre* are representative of the moral and social attitudes of the historical period in which they were writ-

ten and should be regarded as a record of social history rather than a prescriptive formula for life today', Liz Maher, President, NSW Group of the Children's Libraries Section of the LAA said today. 'In other respects the books are well written and imaginative and children are quite capable of distinguishing historical events from present day realities.

'To attach any sort of class perspective to *Peter Rabbit* and *Benjamin Bunny* is indeed entering the realms of fantasy,' Ms. Maher said. 'Beatrix Potter's characters also reflect the times in which she wrote, however the moral inherent in *Peter Rabbit* — that to disobey a parent may lead to grief — is universally applicable. One of the special features of Beatrix Potter's books are her delightful illustrations which have given generations of children from all classes of society immense pleasure.

'There is a danger that books read repetitively by small children may influence sex role identification and expectations, however to simply replace illustrations, such as those in the Ladybird series, showing well dressed girls in the kitchen and boys in the garage, with pictures showing girls in garages and boys in the kitchen is reverse sexism. The answer lies in presenting a balance of traditional and non-traditional male/female roles such as boys and girls doing the housework or working in a garage together.

'To autocratically declare that any book more than 10 years old should be destroyed will not guarantee the sensitivity and relevance of those left on the shelves, it will however deny children access to a rich cultural heritage. Surely only totalitarianism seeks to erase history.'

TAFE Library Services on the Move

NSW TAFE Library Services is undergoing a period of significant change. In September 1984, Dagmar Schmidmaier was appointed Head of TAFE Library Services and in February 1985, Lois Woods joined the senior management team as Systems Officer. TAFE Library Services is a large centralised organisation comprising 70 staffed college libraries and a resource materials budget of \$2.5 million. The acquisition and processing of resource materials is handled by a centralised Technical Services Branch which will be located at Parramatta from the second week in May. (There is one regional processing centre at Newcastle College of TAFE, providing technical services for the Hunter Region). TAFE Library Services is a member of CLANN and will be looking forward to implementing LION, an online cataloguing system provided to CLANN via Idaps. In addition extensive planning is underway to ensure TAFE Library Services has a smooth transition to CLANN's OPAC and online circulation control systems to be provided by GEAC.

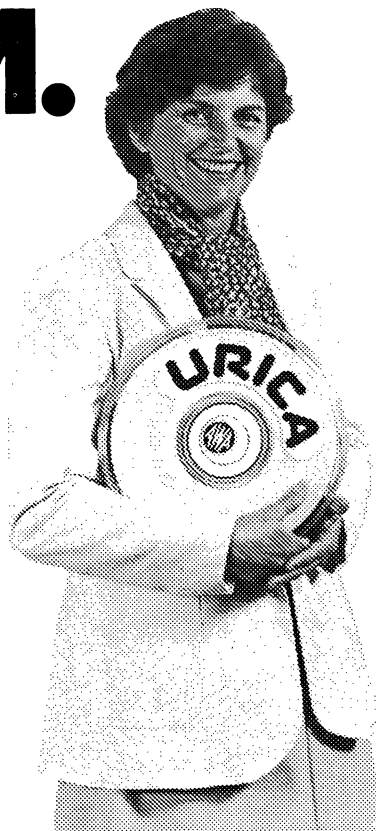
The Head of TAFE Library Services including its policy and planning unit will remain at 323 Castlereagh Street, Sydney. The Technical Services Branch will be located at Parramatta.

Dagmar Schmidmaier (Ms)
Head of TAFE Library Services

BAKER AND TAYLOR

Joe Mauch, Baker and Taylor's Australian representative, now has a permanent office at 22/2 Beattie Street, Balmain 2041. Phone no: 818 2951, toll free 008 22 5108. Telex: AA176279.

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