the front line

Alvin Toffler in his book *The Echo-Spasm Report* claims that society is moving into a period of extreme dislocation which is not merely an economic crisis but a crisis in civilisation. 'What we are witnessing,' he says, 'is the overall breakdown of industrial society and the transition to new forms of social organisation . . .'

Those of us in the library and information community take it almost as an article of faith that libraries have a vital role to play in assisting society to adjust to these dislocations through their educative, recreational, humanising and democratic role. And yet as we have seen in recent months, libraries of all complexions are being subjected to rigorous examination and the economic value of their services sharply defined. As one overseas commentator (Thacker) said recently 'Libraries have become expensive to operate and society is no longer sure that they are worth their high cost.'

In his article in a recent issue of *AARL*, Colin Steele gives an overview of some of the Australian library reviews which have taken place in recent years. We now have news of the Report of the State Library of Victoria Development Study which acknowledges that the library is at 'the most critical point in its 131-year history', and admits 'its valuable materials are deteriorating through neglect, its buildings are unsuitable and in a poor state . . .' and that it has insufficient resources. Nevertheless, if recommendations in the report to the State Government are accepted, plans to move the State Library from its cramped, deteriorating premises into a new building will be postponed (indefinitely?) in favour of a $7 million refit. Meanwhile the State Government is spending between $70 million and $150 million on a national tennis centre to be used a few times a year.

News filtering out about the Block review of Commonwealth Departmental Libraries suggests some radical rationalisation and restructuring, while in the private sector some libraries, both well-established and providing a range of innovative services (such as the head office of CSR) have been summarily closed.

These developments are manifestations of the harsher economic climate in which we are operating and consequent demands for cost-benefit justification. They also reflect, at least in part, some assessment by society or the value of these services.

As misguided and ill-informed as these assessments may be, they are dangerous and must be challenged. This is why I believe today's librarians must take a dynamic entrepreneurial role in the promotion and development of their services.

The majority of libraries operate within the broad public sector. In times of contracting public sector spending, publicly-funded libraries and information services, in common with other publicly-supported services, are being asked to expand their diminishing resource base by seeking alternative funding sources.

These are the realities with which we live in 1987 and with which I believe we shall continue to live. We must demonstrate our worth and be prepared to recover at least some of our costs. The Government demands it, society demands it, and increasingly our employers demand it.
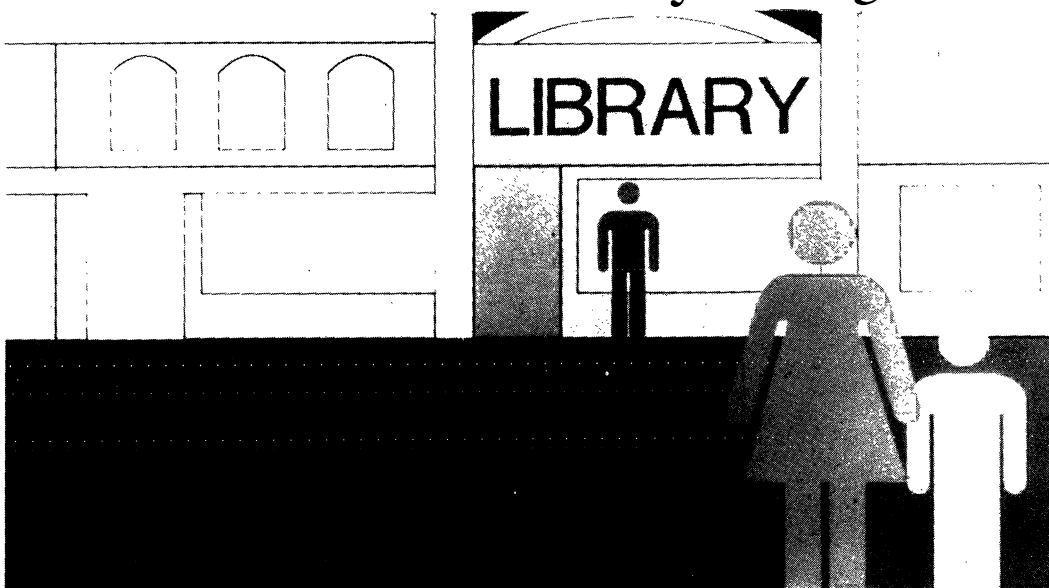
Peter Dawe
President.

IFLA/LAA gets first major sponsor

The Network (James Bennett, John Menzies, Coutts, and Readmore) has agreed to become the first major sponsor of the IFLA/LAA Joint Conference next year. Managing Director of the Network, Colin Harrison, was in Australia recently and met with Jenny Adams to discuss details of the sponsorship. The conference will be held at the University of New South Wales, 27 August to 3 September, 1988.

Colin Harrison, (left) Andy Dakers, with recently retired LAA Director, Jenny Adams.

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