the front line

In my last column I was speaking of the kind of society I believed we would all wish to see develop in Australia. Russell Ackoff, a leading figure in Operations Research has said that 'Since we can't foresee the future we should identify the future we want, and then design a strategy and move towards it.'

Since it is central to our national well-being, and central to our profession, I believe that there is no more important strategy for us to design than a National Information Policy. As we know, this is a priority for the LAA/ALIA in 1987, although there has already been a deal of activity in this area by numbers of bodies, most recently by our Association in draft statements issued in 1984, 1986 and 1987.

In expressing the need for a National Information Policy we are stating our conviction that access to, and use of information, within a national framework which recognises purposes and goals of information provision and use, is fundamental to the realisation of the kind of society in which we all wish to live.

While it is important to have a statement, or statements of policy, I believe that we need to broaden this approach by developing statements of principle and practice. In other words, I believe that we need a National Strategy Plan for the provision of library and information services in this country.

Many of the elements of such a Plan already exist; after all these discussions have been going on for a long time. One has only to think of STISEC, the Tell Seminar, the ill-fated ALBIS, the Horton Report, various inter-departmental working groups, the work of the Department of Science, of AACOBS, ALIC and of our own Association as well as contributions by individuals. There has been a great deal of activity in the broad field of NIP but sadly not much practical outcome.

Some of the issues which need to be addressed and resolved include formal recognition by governments of the need for such a policy; clear policies by government itself on the production, availability and use of its own information; appropriate use of technology; better mechanisms of cooperation and resource sharing; charging for services; relationships between the public and private sectors; development of library services at all levels; education of users; questions of copyright and 'Freedom of Information'; funding; and communications, to name but a few. (Diana Killen gives a more comprehensive list in her paper to Online '87.)

We are aware that we are living in 'the information society' and indeed are an important part of that society. We are aware that information is a 'mighty engine' of economic growth, which in turn provides the basis for an enriched and enriching society. We are aware that Australia has in its libraries and related institutions an infra-structure on which Australia can build its information society of the future.

The LAA is anxious to play its part in developing a national information blue-print for the future, and later this year we shall be asking members to take an active part in achieving this goal. Meanwhile I, or any members of the Executive or Council, would welcome your views on this important topic.

Peter Dawe
President

Next issue: *InCite* takes a look at the LAA 50th Anniversary celebrations; and 'Conferences in focus' will report on how the programs for the Law Librarians/Special Librarians Conference and Library Technicians Conference are shaping up!

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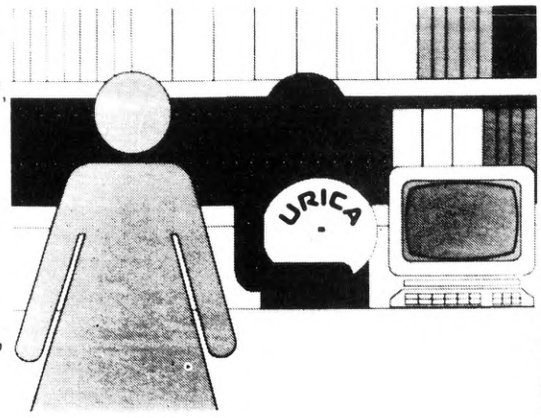

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