



the front line

Promiscuous library leaders . . . a necessary risk?

In 'Learning from the past: does territoriality make a profession?' (ALJ, Nov. 1987, pp.253-255) a paper presented at the 1987 LAA:50 Canberra conference, Bob Sharman, State Librarian of WA and also now a member of that state's senior executive, emphasised the LAA's 'unfortunate proclivity for the negative defence of territorial issues'.

Bob Sharman focused in his paper on our reactions to non-librarians being appointed as senior library administrators and stated, 'Most of the senior library jobs in this country are downgraded because we have said they are available only to librarians: administrators have then said that if an efficient administrator cannot apply for them, they had better not be regarded as being worthy of top remuneration. The mistakes we made in the past are precisely those being made today.'

Do we have to make them in the future? Bob Sharman's predecessor as State Librarian of WA, F. A. Sharr, sounded what to some will be a similarly iconoclastic note in an address to the March 1988 WA Branch annual general meeting which I was fortunate enough to attend.

Copies of that address are available from the Sydney, Victorian and WA offices but his words I now quote at some length because

they are a commentary on an issue about which we can continue to squawk in reaction, but to increasingly less avail; or about which we can be professionally proactive, and turn to overall advantage for librarianship and the development of libraries.

In the past, the only way to get on in librarianship was to start at the bottom and work up to positions which were increasingly managerial rather than professional. The outcome of that system was, all too often, middle-aged librarians who had lost some, or most, of their zest for librarianship because they were forced increasingly to divorce themselves from real librarianship and move into management, which they found unsatisfying and for which, perhaps, they were not well fitted.

Enter two new factors. *In the past, a large book stock was necessary for good quality of service and, therefore, for personal professional satisfaction; hence large libraries and hierarchies. Now, EDP, micro-reproduction and efficient interlibrary co-operation (if that were developed) made it possible for relatively small libraries, especially in restricted subject fields, to give a good quality of service and personal satisfaction to the librarians. Thus, the nexus between large size, quality of service and hierarchical organisation has been weakened, if not broken.*

Concurrently, there is an internationally widespread move to recognise that the administration of libraries is an aspect of administration rather than of librarianship and consequently a trend to appoint non-librarians of ability to administrative positions in libraries. This need not be detrimental to librarianship.

Real librarianship, at the interface of people and information is similar to medicine. It looks after people, as a GP looks after

people. Both require an understanding of people; diagnostic skills to assess the real needs of the patient/enquirer; a thorough knowledge of drug/information sources; a range of specific skills. It is up to professional librarians and library schools to fit themselves and their students for a long-term career of looking after users, with increasing skill and sophistication as they grow older, just as good doctors do. Then librarians could cease to look over their shoulders, yearningly, towards managerial positions and who by temperament were fitted, and by study had chosen to fit themselves, for the profession of administration, or by non-librarian administrators who had learned what libraries are about. That, of course, implies that librarians are good enough communicators to teach the administrators what they need to know about libraries and librarians: their purposes, aspirations, ethics and so on.

Thus there would be two parallel routes of advancement: one in librarianship, the other in administration, both professional. The role of the administrators, at each level, would not be superior to that of the librarians, but rather to contribute their specialised skills to the whole enterprise and, by relieving the librarians of extraneous chores and distractions, to enable them to devote their whole energies to the professional service of their users, as hospital administrators enable doctors to concentrate on healing the sick and a GP's accountant relieves him or her of financial responsibilities for which he or she has not been trained.

The iteration of this viewpoint coincides with a cultural revolution in public service management — a revolution characterised by the remodelling of the upper levels of the public services in the form of a technically

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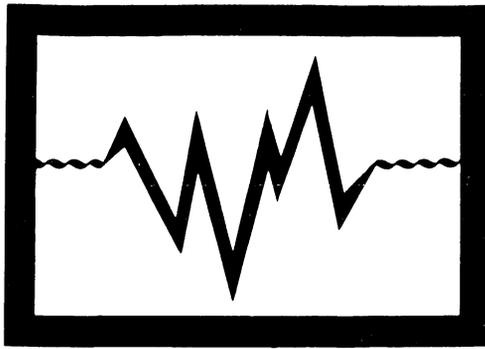
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IN THE NEWS

Rod East Fellowship

Just over two years ago, librarianship lost a dedicated worker and advocate, Rod East. Rod built up a reputation as a committed exponent of South Australian public libraries in a career that spanned 20 years. In recognition of his contribution to librarianship, a fellowship has been established to enable people interested in the public library field to undertake a 2-4 week program of research, study or training in Australia, New Zealand or Papua New Guinea.

The first Rod East Memorial Fellowship has been awarded to Sue Sander, Chief Librarian at Tea Tree Gully Public Library. She will be studying joint-use library operations throughout Australia. Further information on the Rod East Fellowship is available from Philippa Middleton (08) 382 1022.

Happy Birthday Australia!

Frances Miller, an American children's writer, has organised for eight sets of American books to be sent to each state of Australia. The set contains 50-70 fiction, non-fiction and reference titles for Grades K-6, as well as maps and taped songs. Also included is a huge selection of hand-crafted birthday cards from individuals, libraries and schools all over the US. The HBA books which will tour municipal libraries throughout the year and next year will be made available to schools.

Swets on the line

DataSwets, the online data communication system of Swets Subscription Service, is now available free of charge to their Australian customers.

DataSwets offers the possibility of searching the bibliographic files of Swets, and also ISDS (International Serials Data System), online. Customers can gain access to information regarding subscriptions, and can also transmit orders and claims via the system. An electronic mailbox function provides direct access to their contact person at Swets. A DataSwets demonstration will be given at the forthcoming LAA/IFLA conference. Further information can be obtained from Kevin Ward at Swets Subscription Service, PO Box 830, 2160 SZ, Lisse, The Netherlands.

Call for library books

Ramakrishna Mission would like both educational and recreational books no longer needed in libraries for disadvantaged and orphaned children in India. It does not matter if the books are in a bad state of repair.

Any books which you may be able to donate will be collected by the mission at their expense. For further information contact: Helen Coombs on (07) 839 5760

A first for technicians?

1988 President of the Northern Areas Regional Group of the LAA in Tasmania is Library Technician, Robyn McKenzie. As far as we can determine, this is the very first time a library technician has been elected President of a state Branch or Regional Group. Congratulations Robyn!

Contemplating the J-curve

IBIS Business Information has developed a series of thought provoking videos featuring the comments of business and economics spokesperson Phil Ruthven.

The set of six tapes each analyse and discuss the issues of the 1990s, depression and recovery, privatisation, leadership versus management etc. Further details are available from Robert Portelli, IBIS Business Information, Melbourne (03) 614 5005.

IBBY luncheon

This luncheon will take place on Sunday 28 August at 12.45pm (note change of date in initial program from Monday 29 August) in the Senior Common Room Club at the University of New South Wales (top floor of the Electrical Engineering Building in the middle of the campus). Guest speaker will be Lioba Betten, Deputy Director of the famous International Youth Library in Munich, West Germany.

Cost is \$30 for a smorgasbord including wines and juices. Send cheques to IBBY Australia, PO BOX 194, Edgecliff, NSW 2027.

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oriented elite recruited on merit and defined in terms of higher education credentials. So where's the danger in these managers heading our larger library and information services? In 'The concept of public management and the Australian state in the 1980s' (*Australian Journal of Public Administration*, Dec. 1987, pp. 339-353) Anna Yeatman sounds a caution: *The technical flexibility, curiosity and openness of the professional public managers are extraordinary. These virtues encourage the hope that they might be placed at the service of our welfare as a community. The problem is that the technical orientation of public managers can be used for any set of value commitments. In this respect the professional managers are relatively indifferent to which ends their technical services are given. They are teleologically promiscuous.*

Will the development of this nation's network of library and information services — the primary concern of our profession — be at risk if we accept library administrators who may be thus promiscuous? Two of our leaders, both past Presidents of the LAA, consider there are greater risks if we do not.

But before this President brings the issue before the August meeting of the Executive Committee and General Council for the commencement of a policy review, what do you think? Write to *InCite*.

Alan Bundy
President

[**teleology** *Ethics*. the doctrine that right and wrong are to be determined solely by the efficacy of actions attaining desirable ends. *Macquarie Dictionary*]

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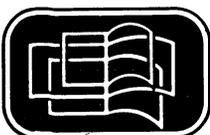
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