

Front Line



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ISSUES of censorship and intellectual freedom are not currently prominent topics of concern in Australia. Because of this, Australians tend to forget that the freedom to think, write and speak is not available in many other countries. Such freedom was won in Australia after struggle and, from time to time, is still under threat. Controversies such as those surrounding the British

author Salman Rushdie and his recently published book *Satanic Verses* serve to remind us of how fragile this freedom is and how quickly and seriously it can be threatened. In this case the attack is from a fundamentalist country but it behoves us to remember that such attacks can be made at a less obvious and more subtle level and can and do occur in Australia.

The Rushdie affair is a stunning reminder that the maintenance of intellectual freedom is a constant battle: we cannot rest and think that the battle is won. It has been gratifying to see so many of the Western democracies condemning not only the crudity and violence of this death threat from another nation but also the attempt to stop the circulation of a work of imagination and to see such serious steps being taken to express that condemnation.

For us as librarians it raises old issues once more. Censorship of the books available in a library or for purchase in a bookshop are our concern. In a democratic society, to ensure its health, ideas and books must be able to circulate

freely, however extreme the views they present. The fact that they are able to be published makes the ideas less dangerous as they can be widely circulated and discussed. The wish of special interest groups to dictate to the rest of the community as to what it may see and read must be resisted and librarians have a key role to see that this is done. This is not an easy task as in many situations resistance by the librarian to requests for removal of works from the shelves may result in dismissal. The pressure that was brought to bear on the librarian at the Bradford Public Library which resulted in the withdrawal of *Satanic Verses* from the shelves can be imagined as Bradford has a large Muslim population. The owner of a chain of bookstores in the UK removed the book from sale because of the threats made to staff but has now returned the book to stock. The printed word is a powerful means of circulating news and ideas and as librarians we have a role to play in ensuring that circulation continues.

Although the Rushdie affair is an extreme case of censorship and control of intellectual freedom it is interesting to see how often such actions are made in a lower key in libraries.

Continued opposite.

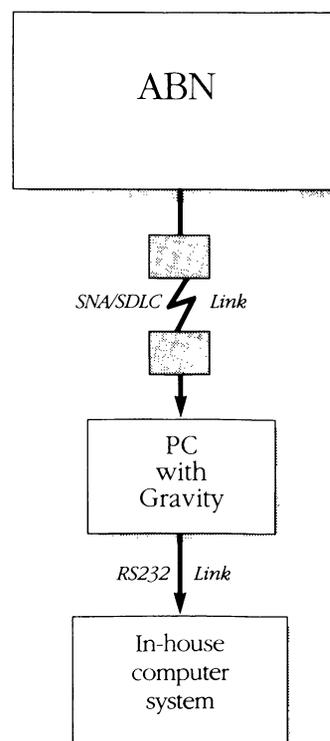
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Front Line ... continued

Regular reading of the professional journals from the USA, for instance, reveals attempts at the local public library or school library level to have specific titles or subjects removed from the shelves. The American Library Association plays a strong role in supporting librarians in resistance to such attacks. The ALA's Intellectual Freedom Committee has a charter to respond to threats to intellectual freedom from federal, state and local government, the private sector and within libraries. ALIA has been active in this same area and has a statement on 'Freedom to Read' which says, in part, 'A librarian, should not exercise censorship in the selection of materials by rejecting on moral, political, racial or religious grounds alone material which is otherwise relevant to the purpose of the library and meets the standards, such as historical importance, intellectual integrity, effectiveness of expression or accuracy of information which are required by the library concerned. Material should not be rejected on the grounds that its content is controversial or likely to offend some

sections of the library's community.' Adherence to these principles is part of our professional responsibility.

In case we, as Australians, are complacent about our own situation, it would be interesting to know how many of our members have been subjected to requests and then pressure to remove specific titles or subjects from collections. In my own professional experience I have been asked to remove works by an American author considered unsuitable by a non-librarian for inclusion in the library's collection. As an Association we have supported members under pressure to censor collections by the narrow interests of sections of the community served by the library. Even more interesting would be the numbers of librarians who exercise self-censorship in the development of their collections. How many do not purchase a particular work because the aggression it might raise in the community is better left unaroused?

It is important that we as a profession have the certainty and the strength to

resist attempts by interest groups to censor professionally developed collections and by so doing to limit intellectual freedom of our country. We should not kid ourselves that there will not be requests made to remove *Satanic Verses* from the shelves of our libraries. Australia has a large Muslim community which has religious affiliation with Iran and which may be genuinely offended by the contents of this book. As Australian librarians, we should take the controversy about Salman Rushdie and *Satanic Verses* as a warning, that we have to be vigilant in resisting forces wishing to control the kind of material we have in our libraries on which a professional judgement has already been made for inclusion.

A gentle nudge ...

for those of you who have yet to unearth your 1989 ALIA membership renewal form. In order to ensure continued receipt of *InCite* etc. you'll have to do it now — it was due on 28 February.

Keeping a permanent record

COPIES of the AICCM pamphlet 'Paper, here today ... gone tomorrow' have been distributed to 150 members of the ALIA Conservation of Library Materials Special Interest Group. This group was formed in May 1987, following the LAA sponsored seminar on 'Library materials preservation' held at Fisher Library, University of Sydney in December 1986.

The AICCM pamphlet explains what causes paper to deteriorate and offers some remedies. It aims to raise consciousness about the problem, recommends greater use of permanent paper by those creating today's records and contains a selected list of suppliers of archival quality paper in all States. For a copy of the pamphlet, contact me, Helen Price, ALIA Bicentennial Conservator (until the grant runs out in September) and editor of the special interest group newsletter. I can be reached on (02) 697 3447 or, by mail, at the School of Librarianship, University of New South Wales, PO Box 1, Kensington 2033.

group of pleasant people, choose a gathering of map enthusiasts. They include map collectors, compilers, librarians, publishers and sellers as well as geographers, geologists, surveyors, orienteers and bushwalkers. Their national association is called the Australian Map Circle.

Early this year the Map Circle Conference was held in the Geography Department and the new library at Wollongong University. It was one of the friendliest affairs I have attended. The Keynote Speaker was Professor Robert Clancy of the Pathology Department, University of Newcastle. He illustrated his address with slides of a dozen or so pre-1600 world maps which he owns. The maps are usually kept at the Newcastle Regional Gallery. The following day it was a joy to view the originals and admire their good condition. The artistry of the decoration and quality of the printmaking technique was notable. Original or early handcolouring was still bright, enhancing the attractiveness of these handsome items.

The conference included a visit to the Australian Pulp and Paper Mills' (APPM) Shoalhaven factory at Bomader-

ry, near Nowra. Here the craft of paper-making is carried out. In the mill seminar room the staff chemist gave a talk about paper generally, its various attributes and what was needed or desirable for map paper.

I gave a talk about preservation of map collections and following that all participants were given tours of the mill.

The paper samples distributed during this interesting tour were very promising. The mill produces a number of specialty papers with a higher than neutral pH. One — *Perpetuum* — may conform to the ASA permanent paper standard which is being finalised. Some APPM papers are marketed through Daltons Paper. If you are interested in samples of Shoalhaven papers please contact me and let me know what quantities of Archive Text you normally use per year. We want to encourage a paper dealer to hold stocks of *Perpetuum* on a permanent basis (no pun meant) for users needing less than 25 tonnes!

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