

FRONT



Averill Edwards: Past President

Almost a year ago I wrote about the death threats which had been made by the Ayatollah Khomeini to the British author Salman Rushdie for his book *Satanic verses*. It is sad to see that 1 year after the Iranians sentenced Rushdie to death that the sentence has not been withdrawn but has instead been repeated. The results for Rushdie have been serious. He has been forced to live in a secret location, his own home has been abandoned and his literary output has been curtailed. Rushdie has written bitterly of the effect on his life of the death threat in recent press articles.

Penguin/Viking the publishers of *Satanic verses* have delayed the publication of the paperback edition of the work, because of the physical dangers it may have on the lives of those who publish, sell or distribute the book. It seems likely that the paperback version will not be available to libraries or to individuals for some time, if ever.

On the face of it this group has effectively censored the publication of *Satanic verses*, and forced into hiding and at least temporarily prevented an author from writing, because that group did not agree with the views expressed in his novel. This has been done in the face of universal condemnation of the death threat. It would be interesting to know how many libraries in Australia and overseas still do not hold the book because of the threats of physical violence made to staff and buildings if *Satanic verses* is made available.

There is a dangerous principle here - prevention by intimidation, of the distribution and discussion of ideas, opposed by particular groups. It is a principle that civilised societies condemn. The wide circulation and discussion of ideas is a characteristic of a healthy society; oppression of ideas by whatever means can only lead to ignorance and to violence.

The ultimate irony in what has happened with *Satanic verses*, is that it is an expression of fear of the power of the written work, and is a recognition of the fact that the materials that librarians work with every day - words and books - have the capacity to influence every aspect of our world. Fear of the power of those ideas and words is behind every banned book.

In Australia efforts continue to be made to censor books. Last year the banning of the childrens book *Forever* by Judith Blume, by the NSW Director-General of Education is only one example of the same danger that is present in Australian society. However the recommendation came to the Director-General, to ban the book from NSW schools libraries, the fact remains that the book was banned and without much consultation or realisation of what was actually being done. The protests which followed the ban and which undoubtedly led to its reversal, served to show that there are people prepared to oppose such senseless bans and that public protest can sometimes be successful. The real shock was that the bureaucrats were so easily convinced and took such a dangerous step so quickly.

Censorship A lurking danger

The implications for us as librarians and as members of the Australian community are clear. We need to be alert to every attempt to try and limit the circulation of ideas and their discussion, and be prepared to speak out in protest however difficult that may be for us. Specific groups in the community have every right to express their views but do not have the right to impose those views on others, by preventing librarians placing those books in the libraries for which they are responsible. This association must do all that it can to ensure that there is no censorship of materials, exerted by individuals or groups who wish to prevent circulation of ideas, with which they do not agree. Let us hope that this lurking danger does not become so great in Australia that ALIA has to establish a committee on intellectual freedom.



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not so where local government records are concerned! She went on to say that she was looking forward to receiving a flood of requests from local government bodies asking for the return of their records.

The return of the minutes from 1882-84 now means that the Campbelltown City Council has a complete set of Campbelltown minutes from 1882 to the present, as well as Ingleburn Municipal Council minutes from 1903-48. Ingleburn minutes from 1896 to 1902 are still missing.

Many of the former Ingleburn Municipal Council's records dating back to the early decades of this century have been located at the Ingleburn Baby Health Centre, formerly the Ingleburn Council Chambers. Included among these records was the Minute Book for 1945, which had long been missing.

Interest in the archives of the Campbelltown Council has also been stimulated by a report by two students from the University of New South Wales, who had been working at the Campbelltown City Library during 1989 locating and describing records, as part of the requirements for the Diploma in Information Management (Archives Administration).

Margy Burn also presented the Mayor with microfilmed copies of the records, in order to allow copying and to ensure the preservation of the original documents. Campbelltown City Library is currently in the process of having the remaining Minute Books microfilmed.

In concluding, Margy Burn said that the lead taken by the Campbelltown City Library wouldn't have taken place but for the Action Committee on Local Government Records. The changes to Ordinance 1 of the Local Government Act in 1985 have meant that local government authorities are responsible for the maintenance and preservation of a far wider range of records than previously was the case. It is unfortunate that many authorities are unable to provide adequate staff at present to ensure the maintenance and preservation of such valuable records.

Ross Connell

