

## Flying kites above tall poppies

It seems that here in Canberra that it has become *de rigeur* to write one's political memoirs. John Button, generally well-liked and viewed as a gentleman in the corridors of power (in spite of a propensity to occasionally dabble in issues of economic policy beyond his portfolio responsibilities), has opted to prepare an account of his travels as a politician.

Called *Flying the kite*, Button's book makes some humorous and

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perceptive observations about travel, events and people. More importantly the book gives some insights into the insularity of Australian thinking and about our traditional preference for borrowing ideas from unlike nations in distant places and at different stages of economic, social and political evolution. Button says that while we were looking to the UK, Europe and North America for guidance, our Asian neighbours were revolutionising their industries and experiencing rapid economic change.

He notes too another characteristic of the Australian mentality, which unfortunately still prevails in many circles... 'Australian tall poppies' — whether they were intellectuals, scientists, artists or business people — were treated with scepticism and indifference. Visit-

ing tall poppies, however mediocre or irrelevant, were regarded with deference and acclaim'.

Lest we slip '...back into introspection and comfortable insularity' it would be wise to heed the advice that Button gives in *Flying the kite*. If you are interested in how overseas experience shapes Australian thinking it is well worth a read.

Button, John, *Flying the kite: travels of an Australian politician*, Random House, 1994. ISBN 0 09 182872 4. RRP \$16.95. ■

## Catalysts for change

According to the editors, this book will provide 'guidance for the leaders and library staffs of the decade'. The content is a diverse mix of both visionary approaches to managing change, and more practical material and case study presentations. Some contributions are specifically library-oriented while others make no or only marginal reference to libraries. This is both the book's strength and weakness. It is possible to pick and choose between such diverse topics as transformational leadership and the concept of the library as a learning organisation, to use of the budget as a planning tool and managing the mature worker in the 1990s. Because of this diversity the book lacks the overall theme and co-ordinated treatment of subject matter that its title *Catalysts for change* would suggest. The contents target a US market with various papers containing demo-

graphic, legislative and educational systems information of specific interest to that audience. This limits its use for Australian librarians.

The more interesting and thought-provoking papers which reflect the volume's intent include an examination of staff empowerment as a change strategy, applying Peter Senge's model of the learning organisation to guide the transformation of libraries in the 1990s and several analyses of leadership approaches needed in these times of rapid change.

The papers are also separately published as volume 18, numbers 3/4 of the *Journal of library administration* (1993). Many readers may prefer to access individual papers through this channel.

Von Dran, Gisela M. and Cargill, Jennifer, Eds. *Catalysts for change: managing libraries in the 1990s*. New York: Haworth Press, c1993. 198pp. US \$29.95. ISBN 1-56024-516-6.

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