

FRONTLINE

Working with government

Here in New South Wales, we are certainly living in interesting times. As if hosting the LAA/IFLA conference and preparing for the Summit weren't enough, we have had a change of government and some radical developments impinging on the provision of library services.

Firstly, a bill for Freedom of Information (FOI) has been introduced for New South Wales. The NSW Branch has spent many years pressing for legislation on these lines to ensure the right of individuals to information held by the government.

On the Branch's agenda, as part of a Public Libraries Section deputation to Peter Collins, Minister for the Arts, was the FOI bill. The question of provision of the Government *Gazette* free to public libraries was raised, as it is the key source of information about government plans and is readily available.

Mr Collins was not enthusiastic about the proposal and indicated that even state government departments are required to subscribe to the *Gazette*. He did, however, react enthusiastically to the concept of public libraries as points of general provision for state government information throughout the state. Following this discussion he requested that a meeting between the Public Libraries Section and the Government Information Service be convened to examine the feasibility of the proposal.

The Minister expressed his strong support for public libraries and his desire to raise the state government per capita subsidy from \$1.80 to \$2.50 — a battle he says he has yet to win in

Cabinet.

The second major development at state level came with the action of the new Minister for Education, Dr Terry Metherell which, in effect, has led to a worsening of the position of teacher-librarians relative to working co-operatively with classroom teachers. These changes in policy were related to a change in arrangements for release from face-to-face work for teachers and have also affected art teachers. The changes have been a major contributing factor to the public outcry and protest rallies about education in Sydney, the biggest rallies since Vietnam days. The turmoil in the education system in New South Wales has produced some strange bedfellows such as the Teachers Federation and the P&C Associations — these associations have never before in living memory been united on a political or educational matter. In the early days of the debate, the LAA School Libraries Section secured a meeting with Dr Metherell and it was a case of 'you win some, you lose some'. Dr Metherell held firm on the matter of policy changes on face-to-face teaching, but heard out the Section's views on matters such as ancillary staffing, promotion prospects, supply of casual teachers and the status of the information skills curriculum document which was still in the Department of Education and ministerial pipeline. On these areas the Minister provided positive feedback and agreed to meet the Section again in October when some papers have been prepared by the Section and some checking through the bureaucracy completed on Dr Metherell's side.

While the NSW Branch is disturbed by the step backwards in the implementation of the State's school library policy and recognises the impact on the morale of those most directly

affected, it is pleased to have been heard at least by Dr Metherell, and indeed by Mr Collins. It seems that the importance of the LAA in the formation of opinion within the profession has been recognised in some state government circles.

Apart from working towards achieving these modest successes in lobbying the state government, the NSW Branch has been encouraging newly qualified professionals and para-professionals to join the Association. Our younger members took us to task early in the year for our lack of attention to the needs of this group and set about arranging a program of activities which now has the title 'The Young Ones'. Those of us over the age limit to participate are assured that good times are customary at the 'Young Ones' special social and professional activities, and the Branch will bestow an 'Encouragement Award' shortly on an up-and-coming member. Needless to say, the Branch is delighted with this venture and hopes it will lead to 'bonding' of new recruits to the Association.

And finally, thank you to our interstate colleagues for coming to Sydney and making our biennial conference such a rip-roaring success.

Mairéad Browne
President, NSW Branch

Lobby or lose

Do you want to be an effective lobbyist? John Levett will show you how in an all-day seminar on 18 November at the State Library of NSW. See Happenings for details.

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