



THE EDITORS

P.O. Box 567,
Neutral Bay Junction 2089

NEXT MEETING ... NEXT MEETING ... NEXT MEETING ... NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be an OPEN FORUM on THE PRESENT STATE OF FICTION PUBLISHING. The meeting will be chaired by Barbara Ker Wilson.

DATE: Wednesday, 15th September - 6.30 for 7.00p.m.

RSVP: Dinner is \$8.00. Please RSVP by Tuesday, 14th September.
Narelle Konte. 888 2733.

LAST MEETING

Senator Susan Ryan, Labor Shadow Minister for the Arts, addressed the last meeting of the Editors on the newly drafted ALP policy on publishing. It was the first time she had discussed the new policy with a group of people directly involved in the industry.

The Senator outlined the main features of the policy before opening the meeting to questions and discussion. She emphasized that the ALP has no wish to jeopardise the welfare of the multinationals which have contributed to the growth of the industry in Australia, but rather to ensure the development, growth and survival of independent and small publishers.

To this end, Senator Ryan sought the views of numerous individuals and groups involved in the industry before drafting the paper and establishing the Labor Party's firm commitment to independent publishing. Although a great deal of money has not been allocated as part of the proposed plan, carefully policed loans would certainly be part of the policy. The activities of the Literature Board of the Australia Council would be developed and funding would be increased.

The Liberal Party's proposed sales tax on books (still a distinct possibility) would not form part of a Labor platform.

At this stage, Senator Ryan invited questions from the meeting.

The first questioner asked why the policy supports independent publishers rather than specific books. Senator Ryan explained that the ALP's intention is to support small business (i.e. any business with an annual turnover of less than two million dollars).

The issue was raised of direct assistance via government-run bodies such as Australia Post (e.g. cheaper mailing rates for publishers). Senator Ryan, in supporting this idea, suggested that the AGPS needs modernising and streamlining, the Senator maintained that it could successfully develop a reputation for supporting and assisting independent publishers in practical ways. Sandra Forbes (ABPA) stressed the need for independent publishers to explore direct marketing, and the importance of special rates through Australia Post to make this exercise feasible.

Stemming from Senator Ryan's initial comments, there was considerable discussion regarding the marked distinction made between multinationals and small local publishers. A number of people at the meeting who had worked for multinationals for some time felt that the policy discriminated unfairly against these companies. They pointed out that multinationals in Australia are staffed by Australians, and that the staff members consider themselves to be publishing Australian books for a local market. In many cases, the annual turnover of the Australian operation fulfils the Senator's 'small business' definition. Given all this, there is a group within the industry which feels strongly that multinationals are deserving of government support.

Senator Ryan's response was that multinationals have no inevitable commitment to publishing here - they can pull out if they wish or need to. Broad economic decisions are made overseas, and while these don't affect specific publishing decisions, they do affect policy and the economics of the company. The ALP is not discriminating multinationals, but supporting a sector of the industry which has no other back-up system, just as it supports the Australian film industry.

On the subject of whether or not the ALP wishes to support particular books, Senator Ryan reaffirmed that financial assistance, e.g. low-interest loans, would be available to anyone operating a small but potentially successful publishing business. At the same time, the Party hopes that publishers such as these would tend to publish material reflecting Australian society and that their authors would generally be Australian.

When questioned on how the policy deals with educational publishing, the Senator admitted that this issue is not dealt with in the draft policy, and that a case has not been presented by the publishers. She agreed that the ALP should study this particular area of the industry carefully, bearing in mind the fact that the multinationals have a specific and different role to play at this level.

The Senator reaffirmed ALP support for the Literature Board. In response to a query on the possibility of state and local government involvement in publishing, she commended the NSW Premier's book award. She felt that this level of involvement would probably be all that state and local governments could afford. The Senator regarded assistance to booksellers as being outside the scope of the draft policy.

On the subject of areas still to be reviewed by the ALP, Senator Ryan mentioned the need for the government to examine the affects of new technology on the publishing industry. Any government will have to decide which areas to protect. Broadly, the ALP supports retraining to accommodate new technology, while being aware of the potential unemployment problems this may cause.

The ALP also feels strongly that there is scope to promote Australian culture overseas, e.g. through embassies, and that foreign affairs are culturally weak at present. This area would be reviewed under a Labor government and could well involve the publishing industry.

In conclusion, the Senator stressed again that the issue is not one of multinationals versus independent publishers, but rather one of ensuring that the local industry flourishes. To this end, the ALP welcomes information and feedback from people working within the industry.

If you would like a copy of the ALP draft paper on publishing, please write to Senator Ryan's office, Parliament House, Canberra. 2600.

INSURANCE FOR FREELANCERS

Pat Lawson of Lion Insurance Brokers has contacted us, offering a superannuation and accident insurance plan for self-employed members of the Editors. He points out that this is a particularly good time to start a scheme,

as monthly payments to 30 June next will give tax deductions of at least 11/12 of the total year's premium. Members can backdate to obtain the full twelve months if they wish. To participate, each member must derive at least of his (or her) taxable income from 'personal exertion' (as distinct from investment or property income), and at least half of this personal exertion income must be derived from his (or her) business, profession or trade as a self-employed person.

If you're interested in finding out further details, you should contact Pat Lawson on 929.8155, or write to Lion Insurance Brokers at 80 Alfred Street, Milsons Point 2061.

SPECIAL SEMINAR

We have planned one more for this year, to take place on 6th October (6 - 8 p.m. at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Center). The topic will be 'The editor and production'.

Mary Harnett of the New South Wales Institute of Technology has approached us about the possibility of their presenting a part-time course for editors - perhaps one evening per week. How do you feel about that? Do you think such a course could be useful, and what would you like to see in it? If inspiration strikes, share your thoughts at the next general meeting or the final seminar.