

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C. M.P.,
FOR THE OPENING OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC AND
TECHNICAL LIBRARY (ANSTEL)
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IT IS APPROPRIATE THAT I EXPRESS MY OWN AND THE GOVERNMENT'S INDEBTEDNESS TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY COUNCIL, KENNETH MYER. THIS IS THE SECOND OCCASION IN THE PAST WEEK WHEN I HAVE HAD CAUSE TO ACKNOWLEDGE KEN MYER'S REMARKABLE RECORD OF PUBLIC SERVICE. IN MELBOURNE ON MONDAY I OPENED AN EXHIBITION OF CHINESE CRAFTS WHICH THE MYER STORES HAVE HELPED BRING TO AUSTRALIA. TODAY KEN MYER PRESIDES AT THE OPENING OF ANSTEL. ON THE ONE HAND WE HAVE SEEN HIS CONTRIBUTION TO WIDER PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE ARTS; ON THIS OCCASION WE ACKNOWLEDGE HIS CONTRIBUTION TO WIDER PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION. THE TWO THINGS ARE BY NO MEANS UNRELATED. BOTH ARE CONCERNED WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MORE INFORMED AND SENSITIVE COMMUNITY.

OF COURSE MANY PEOPLE APART FROM KEN MYER HAVE HAD A PART IN PLANNING AND CREATING THIS LIBRARY. THE OPENING OF ANSTEL - A LIBRARY WITHIN A LIBRARY - IS A MOST IMPORTANT STEP IN THE PROVISION OF INFORMATION SERVICES TO THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE. THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL LIBRARY IS THE FIRST PHASE IN THE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY AS AN OPEN INFORMATION SERVICE, REACHING OUT THROUGH ITS ASSOCIATED ORGANISATIONS TO THE WHOLE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY, PROVIDING INFORMATION OF EVERY KIND TO EVERYONE WHO NEEDS IT.

WHAT WE ARE SEEING TODAY ARE THE BEGINNINGS OF A WHOLE NEW CONCEPT OF WHAT A LIBRARY SHOULD BE AND HOW A LIBRARY SHOULD FUNCTION. IN RECENT YEARS THERE HAS BEEN A QUIET REVOLUTION IN THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF LIBRARIES IN AUSTRALIA. WE HAVE COME TO SEE THAT THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF THE LIBRARY - AN ISOLATED AND SELF-CONTAINED COLLECTION OF BOOKS - IS WHOLLY INADEQUATE TO THE NEEDS OF MODERN SOCIETY. ACCESS TO THE TRADITIONAL LIBRARY IS LIMITED, AND EVEN WHERE ACCESS IS POSSIBLE, THE INFORMATION AVAILABLE IS OFTEN HAPHAZARD OR INADEQUATE. THE QUALITY OF LIBRARY SERVICES VARIES FROM STATE TO STATE, FROM CITY TO CITY, AND BETWEEN CITY AND COUNTRY. MANY AUSTRALIANS ARE STILL WITHOUT LIBRARIES OF ANY KIND.

THE SERVICES OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY ARE DESIGNED TO OVERCOME ALL THESE PROBLEMS - LIMITATION OF ACCESS, INSUFFICIENCY OF INFORMATION, INEQUALITY OF SERVICE. THESE PROBLEMS HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY APPARENT IN FIELDS WHERE THERE IS A RAPID GROWTH OF KNOWLEDGE AND A HIGH DEGREE OF SPECIALISATION. THEY HAVE BEEN COMPOUNDED BY RIVALRY BETWEEN ESTABLISHED LIBRARY SERVICES AND INSTITUTIONS. IN THE SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL AREA, FOR EXAMPLE, DIFFERENT BODIES SUCH AS THE CSIRO, THE ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION, VARIOUS GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND THE NATIONAL LIBRARY HAVE ALL PROVIDED LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES WHOSE FUNCTIONS HAVE TENDED TO OVERLAP. ALL THESE SERVICES HAVE BEEN VALUABLE AND TO SOME EXTENT NECESSARY - THEY WILL CERTAINLY CONTINUE - BUT THEIR COMPETITION FOR CUSTOM AND RESOURCES HAS NOT MADE OUR INFORMATION SERVICES MORE EFFICIENT. FOR THESE AND OTHER REASONS - INCLUDING A GENERAL NEGLECT OF LIBRARIES BY GOVERNMENTS IN THE PAST - LIBRARY SERVICES IN AUSTRALIA HAVE LAGGED WELL BEHIND THOSE OF OTHER COMPARABLE COUNTRIES. IT IS TIME WE CAUGHT UP. WE ARE CATCHING UP NOW.

BETTER LIBRARIES AND MORE CONSISTENT STANDARDS OF LIBRARY SERVICE WILL NOT BE ACHIEVED BY THE DUPLICATION OF TRADITIONAL LIBRARY MATERIALS IN EVERY CITY AND TOWN WHERE LIBRARIES ARE NEEDED. THIS WOULD BE HOPELESSLY COSTLY AND INEFFICIENT. YET THIS HAS BEEN THE APPROACH IN THE PAST. TODAY OUR APPROACH IS DIFFERENT. WE HAVE RECOGNISED THE NEED FOR CENTRALISED INFORMATION SERVICES OFFERING THE WIDEST POSSIBLE ACCESS TO INTERESTED PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS. "CENTRALISED" OF COURSE IS A DIRTY WORD, BUT IT WILL BE CLEAR FROM WHAT I HAVE TO SAY THAT THE THEORY INVOLVES NO DEROGATION FROM THE PRINCIPLE OF LOCAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT. WITH THE USE OF COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY AND MODERN COMMUNICATIONS QUICK AND RELIABLE ACCESS TO INFORMATION IS POSSIBLE ANYWHERE IN AUSTRALIA.

WITH THIS IN MIND, THE NATIONAL LIBRARY COUNCIL APPOINTED A COMMITTEE - THE SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL INFORMATION SERVICES ENQUIRY COMMITTEE (STISEC) - TO STUDY NATIONWIDE NEEDS FOR LIBRARY-BASED INFORMATION. MY GOVERNMENT ACCEPTED THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION THAT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY SHOULD HAVE PRIORITY IN THE REFORM OF LIBRARY SERVICES. OTHER SPECIALISED LIBRARY SERVICES IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES WILL BE DEVELOPED LATER. THEY HAVE ALREADY BEEN STARTED. MEANWHILE, WITH THE OPENING OF ANSTEL, THE NATIONAL LIBRARY IS PROVIDING A VALUABLE NEW SERVICE TO THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY.

SOME 80,000 SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL MONOGRAPHS ARE ON OPEN ACCESS THROUGH ANSTEL'S COMPUTER-BASED INFORMATION SERVICE. THEY WILL ENABLE THE STAFF TO ANSWER INQUIRIES FROM USERS THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA. THEY WILL HELP AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES OBTAIN PROMPT ACCESS TO THE LATEST INFORMATION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY. IN ADDITION, THE NATIONAL LIBRARY WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE MUCH BETTER USE OF THE 25,000 SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL PERIODICALS IT RECEIVES FROM AROUND THE WORLD. ANSTEL'S FIRST PUBLICATION IS A LIST OF THESE PERIODICALS. OTHER LIBRARIES AND ORGANISATIONS WILL BE ABLE TO OBTAIN COPIES OF ANY PERIODICALS THEY NEED FROM THE NATIONAL LIBRARY.

I CAN PERHAPS ILLUSTRATE THE VALUE OF THIS SERVICE BY CONSIDERING, SAY, THE NEEDS OF A MEDICAL SPECIALIST IN HOBART. IN THE PAST, EVERY HOSPITAL WOULD TRY TO OBTAIN ALL THE SPECIALIST JOURNALS NEEDED BY ITS STAFF. THIS WAS A DIFFICULT TASK AT THE BEST OF TIMES; TODAY IT IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE. IT IS BETTER FOR EVERY INSTITUTION TO HAVE ACCESS TO A COMPLETE REFERENCE SYSTEM. A CENTRAL INFORMATION LIBRARY WILL OPERATE THE SERVICE AND ISSUE TO EACH SPECIALIST A LIST OF EVERY ARTICLE OR PUBLICATION THAT APPEARS IN THE WORLD DEALING WITH HIS SUBJECT. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT A LIBRARY SUCH AS ANSTEL WILL DO EVERYTHING ITSELF, AND THAT THERE WILL BE NO NEED FOR OTHER ORGANISATIONS TO DEVELOP THEIR OWN LIBRARY SERVICES.

IT MEANS THAT OTHER ORGANISATIONS - INCLUDING OTHER LIBRARIES - WILL BE ABLE TO PLAN THEIR SERVICES MORE EFFECTIVELY. IT WILL ENCOURAGE CO-ORDINATION AND CO-OPERATION - RATHER THAN RIVALRY - BETWEEN INFORMATION SERVICES. INDEED, THIS PROCESS OF CO-ORDINATION IS AN INTERNATIONAL ONE. LIBRARIES AROUND THE WORLD CAN SUPPLY INFORMATION TO A COMPUTER-BASED SYSTEM. THE NATIONAL LIBRARY HAS ALREADY HAD VALUABLE ASSISTANCE FROM CANADA IN THIS REGARD.

I SHOULD MAKE IT CLEAR THAT WHILE ANSTEL ITSELF IS AN INNOVATION, COMPUTER-BASED LIBRARY INFORMATION SERVICES ARE ALREADY WELL ESTABLISHED HERE AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY. THE PROCESS OF REFORMING AND MODERNISING OUR LIBRARY SERVICES HAS BEEN STEADILY GOING AHEAD. THERE ARE ALREADY MORE THAN 5,000 USERS OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY'S COMPUTER-BASED SERVICES. THE SUCCESS OF ANSTEL AND OTHER MODERN INFORMATION SERVICES DEPENDS ON THE SUPPORT AND CO-OPERATION OF MANY INTERESTED GROUPS AND THE READINESS OF LIBRARIES THEMSELVES TO WORK TOGETHER. THE NATIONAL LIBRARY HAS ESTABLISHED A FUND FOR INTER-LIBRARY CO-OPERATION. THROUGH THE GENEROSITY AND GOOD OFFICES OF KEN MYER, THE FUND HAS ALREADY REACHED \$100,000. THE NATIONAL LIBRARY WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO PROVIDE LIBRARY SERVICES EVERYWHERE ON THE SPOT, BUT IT WILL BE ABLE TO PROVIDE LOCAL ORGANISATIONS AND STATE LIBRARIES WITH THE TOOLS AND THE RESOURCES NECESSARY TO MEET THE COMMUNITY'S NEEDS.

SUPPORT FOR LIBRARIES HAS BEEN ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT, YET ONE OF THE LEAST KNOWN, ASPECTS OF MY GOVERNMENT'S WORK. IN MARCH THIS YEAR I ANNOUNCED THE APPOINTMENT OF A WIDE-RANGING COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN AUSTRALIA. IT HAS HELD MORE THAN 20 PUBLIC HEARINGS. WE ARE GIVING DIRECT ASSISTANCE TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO IMPROVE LIBRARY SERVICES. WE ARE IMPROVING SCHOOL AND TERTIARY EDUCATION LIBRARIES IN A NUMBER OF WAYS. OUR COMMITMENT TO LIBRARIES COULD NOT HAVE BEEN BETTER SYMBOLISED THAN IT WAS IN THE CHOICE OF A GIFT FROM THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE TO PAPUA NEW GUINEA ON THE OCCASION OF INDEPENDENCE. OUR GIFT WILL TAKE THE FORM OF A NATIONAL LIBRARY BUILDING AND ASSOCIATED BOOKS AND EQUIPMENT.

THE GOVERNMENT'S BASIC OBJECTIVE IS NOT JUST TO PROVIDE MORE BOOKS AND BETTER BUILDINGS BUT TO RATIONALISE LIBRARY SERVICE EVERYWHERE AND ENSURE THAT WHEREVER AUSTRALIANS LIVE THEY HAVE THE SAME ACCESS TO EVERYTHING A LIBRARY CAN PROVIDE - WORKS OF LITERATURE, CULTURAL ENRICHMENT, CONTACT WITH HISTORIC BOOKS AND DOCUMENTS, AND INFORMATION OF EVERY KIND.

WHEN WE THINK ABOUT IT WE WILL SEE WHAT AN EXTRAORDINARY AND, INDEED, REVOLUTIONARY CONCEPT THIS IS. IN ANY DEMOCRACY, INFORMATION IS THE KEY TO AN INFORMED AND ALERT COMMUNITY - A COMMUNITY THAT IS READY AND ABLE TO TAKE ITS OWN DECISIONS AND PARTICIPATE IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS. WE TAKE FREEDOM OF SPEECH FOR GRANTED, BUT THE ACCOMPANYING FREEDOM, THE NECESSARY COROLLARY, FREEDOM OF INFORMATION, HAS LONG BEEN NEGLECTED. IN ANY TRULY FREE SOCIETY, FREEDOM OF INFORMATION IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS FREEDOM OF SPEECH. A CITIZEN WHOSE ACCESS TO INFORMATION IS LIMITED OR RESTRICTED IS A SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN. I BELIEVE IT WILL BE POSSIBLE, THROUGH THIS GREAT INSTITUTION, THE NATIONAL LIBRARY, TO GUARANTEE FOR EVERY AUSTRALIAN - NOT JUST THOSE WHO LIVE IN CANBERRA - ACCESS TO INFORMATION OF ANY KIND, WHEREVER HE MAY LIVE, WHATEVER HIS JOB, WHATEVER HIS INCOME, WHATEVER HIS EDUCATION. I CAN THINK OF FEW REFORMS THAT CAN BETTER ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF OUR LIVES, AND ENTRENCH THE RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES OF ALL MEMBERS OF A FREE AND RESPONSIBLE COMMUNITY.
