

## NEWS

### **The Independent Scholars Association of Australia**

On August 10th, 1995, a group of more than one hundred men and women came together at the National Library of Australia to attend a Seminar and ratify a proposal for the formation of an Independent Scholars Association of Australia (ISSA).

First publicly mooted by Ann Moyal in her recent autobiography <sup>1</sup> and enthusiastically supported by the Centre for Australian Cultural Studies, Canberra <sup>2</sup> and the National Library of Australia, the concept derives from the view that independent scholars, represent the 'hidden intelligensia' in Australia, a source of scholarship and critical, independent discourse, yet, through their isolation, deinstitutionalization and scattered presence, their contribution and national profile is less recognized than it ought to be.

The idea has relevance in a period when universities, the public service, and other Australian institutions are undergoing considerable change. Many independent scholars have deliberately chosen to eschew academia and to maintain their scholarship from small grants, intermittent contract work, journalism and other tasks. Others include that gathering stream of retired academics who continue to conduct scholarship freed from teaching and administrative grind. Still others are public servants, journalists etc. who produce works of scholarship and criticism over and above their paid employment. And increasingly, with the growing constraints and contractions in Australia's universities, difficulties of tenure, problems of short-term contracts, and the concomitant intellectual constraints perceived in corporate academia, there is a new stream of scholars eager to take early retirement and conduct their scholarship outside the cloisters.

The Association hence sees itself as a network of scholars distinguished by a broad range of creative activities encompassing book and journal publication of research in the humanities and social sciences, and multidisciplinary arenas; film and documentary production; distinguished bodies of media contributions; script writing etc. - work, in sum, that makes a significant contribution to an intellectual critique and understanding of society and of Australia's place in the world.

The network, its interaction, and sense of community is seen as one of the Association's major goals, and a database for members is currently under way. At the same time ISAA is conceived as a union, a forum, and a lobby group both to represent the professional interests of members and, importantly, to foster a culture of intellectual fervour and independent thinking and to give a voice to dissent. A Provisional Council, Canberra-based under the aegis of the Centre for Australian Cultural Studies, has been established, tasked by the recent Seminar to form a Charter, and composed of Dr. David Headon, Dr. Joy Hooton, Patricia Clarke, Dr. Ann-Mari Jordens, Dr. Don Lamberton, Humphrey McQueen, Dr. John Moses, Ann Moyal, a representative of the National Library, Dr. Margaret Steven, and Sydney member, Dr. Ragbir Bhathal.

The response to the original blueprint has been exceptional. An alternative 'invisible college' is taking shape, and what appears to be the world's first association of Independent Scholars is emerging with the promise of becoming an innovative stakeholder in Australia's intellectual life.

#### **NOTES AND REFERENCES**

- 1    *Breakfast with Beaverbook. Memoirs of an Independent Woman*, Hale & Iremonger, 1995.
- 2    C/- Dr. David Headon, Director, Centre for Australian Cultural Studies, Department of English, University College, ADFA, Campbell, ACT, 2600.

**Ann Moyal**