

INTERNATIONAL LIBRARIANSHIP AND THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

by Joseph Reilly

The liberation struggle in South Africa is now on the agenda of international librarianship. The ALA has before it numerous proposals such as SRRT's *Guidelines for Librarians Interacting with South Africa*. IFLA is being challenged to end its recognition of members belonging to the racist government-sponsored library organization known as the South African Institute of Library and Information Science (SAILIS). The Association of American Publishers (AAP), which lobbies on behalf of the U.S. publishing community, is attempting to break the boycott and re-enter the apartheid economy and is seeking ALA endorsement of such a move. Within South Africa there are attempts to launch new non-racial library associations affiliated with the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM).

Our response to these activities must take place in the context of the overall struggle, led by the African National Congress and the MDM to create a non-racial democratic South Africa. Therefore, all librarians deciding to get involved must accept from the outset that the international library community has no say whatsoever in determining the principles or policies of the liberation movement. Those parties who in their overzealous stand on "censorship" or the "free flow of information" would have argued in the 1930's and 40's that the international library community had no right to cut off National Socialist Germany from current information must be dismissed without question. Reactionary elements such as Judith Krug and Robert Wedgeworth, as well as their proxy forces, such as the *Village Voice's* Nat Hentoff, must be monitored closely and brought to task for supporting institutions of the apartheid regime.

Again, the basic principle that we must operate with is that we as librarians must follow the policies of the liberation movement and then develop strategies in line with these policies. Anything else puts us in league with those racist, paternalistic voices that cannot detach themselves from a colonial mentality. The specific policy of the liberation movement is a two-pronged one: 1) isolate the government and all its institutions, whether or not they are its defense forces or its department of education and 2) re-align ourselves with the thousands of non-racial, democratic community-based organizations that make up the MDM. This means, for example, that the ALA must not only pass resolutions condemning the regime's banning, imprisonment and attempted assassination of our colleagues in South Africa (as it indeed did on behalf of librarian Joyce Mabudafhasi during the 1990 Midwinter Conference), but that it must not announce the lifting of restrictions on these beleaguered librarians in a way that implicitly lends praise to the head of the apartheid state (which it did in its April 1990 news release "South African librarian free of restrictions"). If we are to identify ourselves with the democratic majority of

South Africa, then we must celebrate all of de Klerk's steps as a victory of the South African people and not as the actions of an enlightened regime.

Once this is accomplished, our stand on issues such as the SRRT *Guidelines*, the AAP efforts to end the "book boycott", and the removal of SAILIS members from IFLA will be rooted in the language of the liberation movement, which, by the regime's own admission, represents tens of millions of South African citizens. From here we can participate in the efforts to construct a post-apartheid South Africa as allies of the democratic majority. Serious matters such as mass literacy campaigns will demand our immediate attention. Profound questions such as a New Information Order will demand our contributions and opinions. And the very definition of the library will have to be reassessed in light of the myriad of "resource centers" that have sprung up across South Africa in an effort to provide both informative and leisure materials to the thousands of besieged communities that the apartheid state has wrought havoc upon.

A good starting point is to seek more dialogue with our South African colleagues. We should be in contact with the Education Department of the African National Congress through its Washington D.C. office. We should offer our support to the MDM's National Education Coordinating Committee, as well as its teacher and student associations, all of which have up-to-the-minute statistics and information on education conditions and community-based projects intended to alleviate those conditions. And, most of all, as librarians we must give official, institutional recognition to the new MDM-affiliated non-racial library organization, which is to be launched in July of this year. This organization is being founded by those professional librarians who have fought against the pro-apartheid library structure, SAILIS, for years. They will be working in coordination with all of the above mentioned democratic organizations to construct a post-apartheid information order that will serve the needs of all South African citizens.

It is only these organizations that can speak on behalf of the democratic majority's information needs. Only they can ensure that our material aid is directed to responsible, non-government affiliated institutions with proven track records of community service. Only these organizations can help us select candidates for MLS scholarship programs. If we are to consider ourselves as more than mere observers of the struggle for democracy in South Africa, then our recognition and support of their existence, which is in itself a victory, must come now, and not on the day when the final institutions of apartheid collapse. Such recognition and support must not be limited to public announcements condemning apartheid and affirming the call for non-racial democracy. Our interactions with South Africa must require direct participation in the community-based, service-oriented projects and activities designed and conducted by the MDM and ANC.