

## WORK CIRCLE OF CRITICAL LIBRARY WORKERS (ARBEITSKREIS KRITISCHE BIBLIOTHEKARINNEN) WHO WE ARE - WHAT WE WANT

Library service is not exactly an issue which is likely to appear in the headline news, and yet it has caught the public's attention recently. Before unification there was discussion of how budget plans that allowed for the extensive installation of electronic data processing would result in library staff reduction, cuts in the acquisition of new books and possible increases in the occurrences of censorship. Since the unification, libraries in the former East Germany have come under the new regime and the extent of the potential damage is difficult to see as yet and has been little discussed.

These developments clearly show that:

- Unified German library service is to be subjugated to the practical needs and interests of the economy and state (libraries in the service of research & development).
- Libraries, as part of the State apparatus, will be subjected to serious intervention, threatening the substance of library service (budget cuts, layoffs)
- In a situation in which the social commitment of librarianship is increasingly a sham, active cultural work will only be realized against the bureaucratic obstacles of official librarianship.

We fear that in the new federal states of the former East Germany, a carbon copy of libraries in the "Westzonen" will be created without any attempt to preserve and build on the work performed there in the past.

That will also mean that the unfortunate division between scholarly and public library service will be reestablished, the hierarchical Civil Service structure of the West will be imposed, gigantic networks will obscure and efface local needs and the importance of every kind of volunteer work will be diminished.

Shortened operating hours, library fees, as well as opaque procedures and user-unfriendly organization will make access for the users more difficult and increase patron anxiety. Moreover all this weakens an inadequately developed public awareness of the meaning and importance of "free, accessible, public libraries."

The public's image of the librarian is surely anachronistic, though it is becoming differentiated in various directions. The latest manifestation being the librarian as appendage of a technological book processing machine.

Beneath that image, the inner structure of librarianship is rigid and is characterized by a strict hierarchical organization and concealed discrimination against women. However, in Konstanz and Oldenburg efforts toward cooperative decision-making in the area of wages and compensation are beginning, though it remains to be seen whether or not moves in this direction will have any effect on hierarchical structures such as the BAT system of job classification for civil servants.

Worse, behind the negative public image is the well-known "yea-saying" mentality of public service, its submissiveness and opportunism, hiding in bureaucratic anonymity (compounded by the feeling of no longer having job security as in the past), fear, but also complacency.

Unfortunately, the commitment to serve the state is much further developed than any critical sense of one's own role as part of a democratic society to which one feels a primary obligation.

In this context, the library is less and less the library of the user. Not only does it feel dependent on the state, it feels it belongs to the state.

Well-meaning librarians are thwarted in their obligation to concentrate on the users' interests, that is making the users' interests the center of their profession and facilitating the users' cooperation in library work.

Unification has created a new situation: in the East, under the pressure of impending dismissals and during a time of on-going inquiries into possible collaboration by all-and-sundry with the former East German States Security Service, a climate of denunciation and cowardice is being created that impedes the

formation of democratic structures in all spheres of activity, including librarianship.

Similarly in the West the relationship of librarians to outside intervention in library affairs is exceedingly ambivalent, as evidenced by a submissive obedience to the authorities and the renunciation of procuring "problematic books" (e.g. the writings of Salman Rushdie, Red Army Faction documentation, allegedly pornographic literature, etc.) in order to avoid anticipated intervention.

A generational change within the library may have substituted the "good old boss" with the determined "Big Shot", equipped with modern management and technical know how. But, nevertheless, this has not broken the continuity of conformist conduct as concerns the political aspects of library management.

Clear examples of this are the cooperation of influential librarians in burying the "Library Plans '73" (at the library congress in Hannover 1983), and the recommendation of the scholarly council on periodical requirements of scientific libraries (1986) as well as the express abandonment of the state library in Nord Rhein Westphalen (1991).

Corresponding behavior is manifested in the so-called "Ostlandritt" in which elite "entrepreneurs" from the West takeover upper management positions in the East, by the imposition of Western content and organizational structures, and the wholesale and uncritical replacement of established norms with Western cultural values and standards.

The profession is failing to meet today's challenges. It sees the problem too narrowly, not in its total social context. Significantly, it has not understood the necessity of the creation of potentially effective alliances and coalitions with other groups in the cultural industry.

The ÖTV [Öffentlich Dienst Transport und Verkehr, a large public service trade union in former West Germany representing librarians] is no exception. They see librarians merely as dues payers, as well as foot soldiers for their campaigns and profile pieces.

While the pundits are amused by the apparent inability of librarians to effectively represent their interests through an asso-

ciation of their own, it appears extremely doubtful that the present structure of the existing corporate organization, which is stamped by self-conceit, will continue to dominate the practice of librarianship.

Accordingly, the Work Circle of Critical Library Workers do not see themselves as another institution to secure the established arrangement, but wants to be a forum for discussion and mutual exploration of new forms and possibilities for library work.

We intend to advance the awareness that work in the library must be understood as an act of citizenship, an act that is only possible by resisting bureaucratic domination. In this sense we wish to recover the democratic traditions of library services.

The fundamental basis of our action has to be a redefinition of the role of library services in society. On what should we take a stand? What is the proper perspective for the librarian today?

To establish this the following themes ought to be discussed:

- Libraries as social institutions, their role in the preservation of tradition; libraries as supporters and mediators of social development; libraries and the mastering of the past in East and West.
- Libraries as cultural institutions, in which the entire spectrum of society is reflected.
- Libraries as service institutions: Are the libraries today open to everyone? Must they be subjugated to scientific trends? Must libraries be slaves of technological developments?

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