EDITORIAL:
Institutionalizing silence within ALA?

Appearing in the "Documents" section of this issue of Progressive Librarian is "Librarians Against War: an open letter." This letter expresses opposition to the US-planned bombing raids against Iraq that seemed imminent in mid-February. Written by PL editor Mark Rosenzweig and initially circulated for signatures over the Internet on listservs maintained by PLG, the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) and the Council of the American Library Association (ALA), the letter was signed within a few days by 107 librarians across the U.S. Released under the auspices of SRRT's governing Action Council, the letter appeared in both electronic and paper formats and was distributed to the library press, President Clinton, Secretary of State Madelaine Albright, and to members of both houses of Congress.

Within a week of distribution, and just days before United Nation's General Secretary, Kofi Annan, successfully brokered a diplomatic settlement to the stand-off, SRRT's Action Council Coordinator was telephoned by ALA headquarters in Chicago with the request that SRRT not issue the anti-war statement on SRRT letterhead. Headquarters also wanted a disclaimer indicating that views expressed did not reflect any official position of either the Executive Board or the Council of ALA. It was feared that readers might believe the letter was issued by ALA, although it clearly states that signers are members of SRRT Action Council and supporters.

The day following the telephone conversation, the SRRT Action Council coordinator received an e-mail message in which the request was changed – at the advice of ALA legal counsel! Now, headquarters desired "that [SRRT] include the following phrase ... the Action Council of the Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association voices its opposition to the planned US-led attacks on the nation of Iraq." The message, from acting ALA executive director
Mary Ghikas, concluded, “I anticipate that the ALA Executive Board will address the broader issue beginning this spring.” The “broader issue” is understood to be the issuance of statements of a political nature by bodies within ALA.

Those within the library community who appreciate the freedom SRRT exercises to express “the conscience of ALA” should follow closely the Executive Board’s pending deliberations on this matter.

Recent experience leads us to anticipate a further tightening of bureaucratic and procedural mechanisms within ALA designed to rein-in those voices within librarianship that insist on expressing support or opposition to social and political issues as the need arises. Two examples from the not-so-distant past will remind us of the extent to which ALA will attempt to temper, alter, inhibit or control such expressions.

Recall the debate that arose, during the January 1993 ALA midwinter convention, after librarians around the country received packages of posters, bookmarks and other materials promoting a joint ALA-McDonald’s campaign “Together is better…let’s read!” All materials prominently featured the McDonald’s “golden arches” logo. Sanford Berman, PLG and SRRT member, drafted a resolution that received immediate support from SRRT Action Council. The resolution noted that the program “has resulted in an advertising windfall for McDonald’s” and called upon ALA “to avoid collaborations or funding arrangements in the future that in effect equate books, reading, and libraries with hamburgers or other commodities.” (from Resolution on the “Together is Better” Reading Program, SRRT Action Council, 1/25/93.)

As soon as supporters of the ALA-McDonald’s project got wind of the SRRT statement, they countered it with one of their own and prevailed upon ALA Council to convey to McDonald’s Council’s sincere appreciation of [McDonald’s] support, (past, present, and anticipated future), our assurance that the SRRT speaks for itself in this matter and not for the Association, and our hope that libraries that voluntarily decide to use the materials that have been sent to 16000 of them and order others through ALA Graphics, will find that the materials do indeed achieve their purpose: to encourage more and more “reading together.” (from ALA Council Doc. #48, Midwinter 1993.)

While, on one level, the action and reaction generated by this lively debate can be seen as evidence of a healthy democratic environment within ALA, it is disturbing that the substantive issues raised by SRRT (free advertisement and product identification with libraries) and the widespread anger expressed by many librarians who had received the unsolicited materials were completely ignored in the Council statement.

More disturbing was ALA Council’s recommendation, also in January 1993, to increase quorum at ALA Membership meetings. This move came six months after the infamous Resolution on Israeli Censorship was passed, first by SRRT, then by ALA Membership, and finally by ALA Council – only to be rescinded by Council in January 1993. Many believe the recommendation to raise quorum was a direct result of attempts to keep “controversial” issues from Council’s agenda. So far, it’s worked fairly well, and not one ALA Membership meeting has taken place since.

The ALA Executive Board’s upcoming deliberations occur as ALA’s president-elect (and, therefore, Exec. Board member) Anne Symons is circulating for discussion the draft of a document intended for the general public that outlines ALA’s commitment to intellectual freedom. At press-time the document concludes:

...libraries in the U.S. can contribute to a world free of fear and want, a world which values and protects freedom of speech, a world which tolerates cultural differences and respects individual beliefs, and a world where all are truly equal and free.

How can libraries make any such contribution, if within ALA itself an atmosphere is created that causes librarians to become hesitant, cautiously circumspect or even fearful of voicing opposition to those political, social or “market” forces often responsible for generating, maintaining and promoting fear, want, intolerance and inequality around the globe?

Being debated on the Internet right now is a resolution concerning the Boy Scouts of America and its discriminatory policy prohibiting atheists, agnostics and homosexuals from membership. ALA continues to maintain official relations with BSA, in spite of ALA policies against affiliating with organizations that practice discrimination.

Another hot topic is the planned official visit of Anne Symons to Turkey, a
country mired in some of the worst human rights abuses. Nothing in Symons’ description of her proposed trip indicates even any awareness of the state of intellectual and civil rights in Turkey, much less any plans to take the opportunity to meet with human rights supporters, or to establish relations with those who struggle against a repressive political regime.

These will certainly not be the last controversial issues debated within ALA. If ALA members, officers, staff and divisions are truly committed to a world free of fear and want, one characterized by commitment to intellectual freedom and human equality, then we must not be afraid to support those beliefs in word and deed – consistently. We must ally ourselves with others who share those beliefs, and we must not let self-interest, political expediency or economic pressures provide excuses to restrain the expression of views that seek to put into practice our profession’s highest values.

Elaine Harger

**GARLIC, VODKA, AND THE POLITICS OF GENDER:**
**Anti-intellectualism in American Librarianship**

By Michael Winter

The topic may seem surprising, because librarians are so obviously intellectual, or at least bookish, although they have been called, perhaps unfairly, enemies of books (Adams 1937). They are, to use Seymour Martin Lipset’s nice neutral phrase, culture distributors (Lipset 1981: 333). But as Richard Hofstadter pointed out in his famous 1963 book, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, intellectuals sometimes show a fundamental hostility to the life of the mind, even though it is allegedly more common in people of action. No one is startled when executives denounce the study of history as a waste of time, or when politicians ridicule the efforts of scholars to understand human behavior (Shaffer 1977). Nonetheless, intellectuals occasionally do this too, and sometimes writers duke it out in publishers’ offices. Indeed, it may be one of the favorite occupations of the intellectual classes to show occasionally their anti-intellectualism as a kind of badge of authenticity to the gatekeepers of mass culture. Recently David Bromwich (1996), has suggested that part of the heritage of McCarthyism – a favorite subject of Hofstadter’s also – is the internalization of this hostility (see also Woolf 1964).

Hofstadter’s discussion, however, has a broader sweep. He is concerned with the recurrent cycles of anti-intellectualism that pervade American life, and documents the trend in four basic fields: religion, politics, business, and education. It is, in some periods, much more prevalent than in others (for example, the Ages of Jackson, Harding, Nixon, and Reagan, as opposed to the Ages of Jefferson, Roosevelt, Truman, and Kennedy). And while it may