

have had a fairly cordial relationship, realizing that we actually are on the same side in the defence of what libraries actually have achieved. Two of our activists have received high awards, SAB has issued a book with articles written by one of our ideologists, Ingrid Atlestam, and illustrated by one of our cartoonists, Ulf Larson. We would never be able to afford such a thing. We sent the secretary general of SAB to South Africa to talk about combined libraries at a school library conference that was funded by Sida. Until last year, SAB's chairperson was actually a member of BiS. And, in the last issue of *bis* for 1997 we published a satirical (and maybe not very witty) article rejected by the editors of SAB's journal on a very important issue: the sale by SAB of the majority shares of the dominant library vendor and service company in Sweden. SAB's chairperson was the target of the article. The fact that she hasn't renewed her membership in BiS might have something to do with the article. I'll ask her some day.

Fair Libraries?

Do we put all our efforts in South Africa? I believe some members think so, but we do try to influence the Swedish library scene as well. Keywords are equity and fairness in the rapid development of the library system.

Could it be possible to make an annual award for *the* Fair Library of Sweden? This is what we have been talking about in the last year. We have had a seminar on it, we have written a manifesto and we're working on a sort of elector's system. We have plans of trying to involve one of the successful progressive publishing companies and the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions which has been researching and campaigning on the increasing social gaps in Sweden during the 1990s. The idea is, of course, to focus on the ideological basis of Swedish libraries. By raising the question we also hope to increase the interest of looking at libraries not as a market-oriented kind of shop, but as a social and democratic resource.

And this is what social responsibility in libraries is all about isn't it?

AKRIBIE: Arbeitskreis Kritischer BibliothekarInnen / Working Group of Critical Librarians, Germany

by Frauke Mährt-Thomsen

Who We Are / What We Want / What We Do

Akribie – our abbreviation of Working Group of Critical Librarians – is also a word in the German language that means the quality of exactness or accuracy. So in using this acronym as the name of our organization we want to show with irony that we are doing nothing less than what the average, honest and diligent librarian is doing every day: working with Akribie.

Our small group has been meeting since 1988, our members work in scientific, public and all kinds of special libraries in Germany. Akribie is not a registered organization but rather a forum for candid discussion and joint action, with the goal of finding new, critical forms and possibilities for library work. For this purpose the working group is open to everyone.

We think that libraries and their employees should reflect social change, and make this the basis of their work. We favor democratic internal structures, freedom of group action, and the greatest possible strengthening of individual responsibility. We support the participation of library users in all aspects of substantive decision-making in library work.

There are two or three meetings annually for the discussion of general questions and the exchange of library news. These meetings serve the purpose of continuing education, with occasional visits or lectures by invited speakers. The venue, subject, and shape of the meetings are determined by the participants. Akribie also takes part in librarian's meetings and congresses every year offering information booths as well as forums and presentations on a wide range of topics such as:

- ◆ Books and libraries in ghettos and camps (1990)
- ◆ The honour of professionalism or voluntary labor in libraries (1995)
- ◆ Internet and the future of libraries (1996)
- ◆ Demolishing - the last act? The vanishing of the City and State Library in Dortmund (1997)
- ◆ What is happening at the main national libraries in Germany? Die Deutsche Bibliothek (The German Library) at Frankfurt and the Staatsbibliothek (State Library) at Berlin from the perspective of users? What can supporter groups and friends of the libraries do for our public libraries? (1998)

Contact with similar groups, whether in allied professions or in foreign countries, broadens our knowledge of otherwise little known problems and practices. Thus Akribie has contacts with library and information workers in Germany (AKRIBIE, Bielefeld), with colleagues in Austria (KRIBIBI), England (Information for Social Change), Sweden (Bibliotek i Samhalle = Library in Society) and USA (Progressive Librarians Guild).

For purposes of communication between meetings and for the information of quite a number of colleagues who are interested in the topics of Akribie but cannot come to our meetings, there are a newsletter and occasional reports in the magazine *Laurentius* (Hannover). Each individual member of Akribie is free to decide how much to contribute towards activities and costs.

Akribie is a circle of critical librarians and library employees that has its roots in the protest movement of 1968. In the last years or decades several of us have been engaged in union work or participated in different alternative movements like anti-atomic, disarmament, environmental or the history workshop movement.

The library profession in Germany has a very strong tradition that comes from the Prussian bureaucracy. Like David against Goliath, Akribie aims to fight against this tradition and its implications because it has prevented the democratic development of libraries both inside and outside Germany. So, for most library employees it is still more important to follow the administrative rules than to engage for the service of the users and for the public role of the library.

Although many libraries have staff representatives to ensure the rights of

their workers, there is nevertheless a feeling of subordination and even anxiety among our colleagues. We have to challenge this authoritarian tradition and to overcome the hierarchic structures even in the organization of library employees. There is one organization for each type of employee: academic librarians, librarians with diplomas for scientific or public libraries, and library assistants. After years of discussions about one library federation only the union of public librarians decided to merge with the library assistants.

Akribie has been discussing with colleagues from East German libraries the shrinking of the East German library system. Almost all company libraries have been dismissed, also a great number of public libraries in villages and provincial towns.

Many employees have been discharged or were obliged to retire early, at the Humboldt University in Berlin most of the staff of the Institute of Library Science has been replaced by West German professors. Akribie and the journal *Laurentius* became a forum for East German colleagues to discuss and publish their point of view in this process.

Another point of concern was the consequences of the reunification of East and West Germany in the library and book sector. After reunification in 1990 the greatest part of their recent book production was simply eliminated in Eastern Germany. That was not the result of a political command but was more or less executed as an act of adapting to the rules of free-market economy: empty the depots and make room for western literature. All books published in the GDR were deemed worthless.

There was no official attempt to stop this vandalism, but there were several personal initiatives. A West German clergyman, Father Martin Weskott, started to rescue more than half a million GDR books. These books were stored in a huge barn beside the church in the village of Katlenburg, not far from Gottingen. Every Sunday people from all around the world would come to buy some of these rare documents and sometimes listen to the authors of these discarded books. The money from the book sales was used to fund projects in developing countries. In 1995, Akribie offered a tour from the Bibliothekartag in Gottingen to Katlenburg and held one of its meetings in 1996 in this remarkable village.

Akribie believes that library work should not be restricted to library

management and the implementation of library technology – activities that place in the library building, but that often do not address the library's civil activities.

Akribie is concerned that a primary reason behind the introduction of modern technology by libraries and their boards is the rationalization of library work and services. We fear that libraries as places of communication will disappear behind functions like delivering materials which users in the future will be able to access from their workplaces or from home.

What concept of culture should libraries adopt, and what should they expect from the new technologies. Which technologies should be implemented for which libraries?

To answer these questions, we think it is necessary to study library history as well as library developments in other countries in order to learn from relevant experiences in former times and under different conditions. Especially in Germany there is additional reason to examine the history of libraries, because it is so closely connected to the history of Germany in this century and to the difficulties of Germans in facing this history.

In an effort to examine Germany library history, several meetings and publications of Akribie members have focused on the history of libraries and librarians under Nazi regime and the consequences of this history up to the present day (f.i.: Von faschistischer Tradition in deutschen wissenschaftlichen Bibliotheken. Auf der Suche nach einer demokratischen Bibliothek der Zukunft. 1995).

The main topic of our meeting in Bremen in the fall of 1997 was "The Restitution of Books from Two Points of View: books of Jewish emigrants unlawfully remaining in German libraries, and books as war booty." The program examined the historical and political aspects of the on-going German-Russian discussion about the restitution of books and objects of art.

This meeting gave us the most widespread and positive coverage within the German press. The very established, weekly paper *Die Zeit* wrote about Akribie as a group which "becomes more and more important for the intellectual life in Germany." And the well-known journalist Rolf Michaelis wrote – in reference to our meeting – one page about the activities of the university library of Bremen to retribute the Jewish books.

Agatha Haun from the German-Russian Exchange in St. Petersburg has enabled us to get special reports about the situation of NGO libraries in Russia and has offered to develop partnerships to Russian libraries. We think it will be a valuable opportunity to have contact with very diligent Russian colleagues and to encourage practical and confident cooperation with them.

It is not our position to urge the Russian and Polish people to give us back the books and pieces of art they got after the end of the Second World War. Rather, we seek to find ways that everybody who wants to can see the paintings and use the books.

In recent years, we have gained an increasingly influence within the German library profession though we don't estimate our impact as a very strong one. But quite a number of colleagues are becoming interested in the topics we raise and the articles and books we publish. At the last library congress (Bibliothekartag) in Frankfurt in the beginning of June 1998, conference goers picked up all the copies of *Laurentius* we offered, bought a great number of titles from the *Laurentius* publishing house, and came to meet with Akribie members for discussion.

Finally I want to give a short outline of what social responsibility means for us:

- ♦ free access to public libraries for everybody, free of charge
- ♦ book and media collections free of censorship and restrictions
- ♦ libraries for all citizens, especially for the socially disadvantaged and handicapped
- ♦ dedication to service for all patrons, encouragement for all citizens to become involved in their library and their community
- ♦ democratic structures within the libraries, librarians working for democratic structures in the society
- ♦ supporting the development of socially engaged library work worldwide!

Finally, let me attempt to translate a poem that Akribie places at the end of its self-description:

In other words
Criticism is not a complaint,

but a question
directed toward understanding –
the declaration of war against the
state of affairs
and resignation.



Rafael Enriquez, 1983 OSPAAAL

KRIBIBI: Public Libraries and the “Working Pool of Critical Librarians” in Austria

by Renate Obadalek

The origins of public libraries in Austria, in the past called Volksbuchereien, go back to the 19th century with the setting up of small libraries in three different sectors of society: the parishes of the Catholic Church; Social Democratic educational organizations for workers; and bourgeois library organizations like the guild of the “Central Library” in Vienna. The state itself felt no obligation to run public libraries in favor of better education for the masses.

After World War I and the collapse of Hapsburg Monarchy, the situation basically didn’t change. The First Republic was characterized by the conflict between Conservative Government and Social Democratic communal administration authorities. Even the so called “red” administration of the capital that introduced new standards in public welfare, school education and architecture for the working class, didn’t realize the importance of a public library system. They sponsored the working class libraries, but as private institutions. Running public libraries didn’t become part of the communal or governmental tasks.

It is a shame to admit, but Austrofascism, the dictatorial regime between 1934 and 1938, and National Socialism were the first political movements to recognize the importance of libraries for their educational policies, and they established library systems in the most important towns of the country.

For these historical reasons, the library scene after World War II has been dominated by three stakeholders: the municipalities, the Catholic Church, and the Austrian Federation of Trade Unions. Public library legislation that defines quality and training standards, as exist in other European countries,