

FROM THE ALTERNATIVES LIBRARY

Patent Alternatives

by Lynn Andersen

This issue marks the first of my contributions to the *Progressive Librarian* though it is the second issue to be published as a collaboration between the *Progressive Librarian* editorial staff and the Durland Alternatives Library. The partnership between the two organizations is an effort to expand the activities of PLG by sharing the publishing costs thereby freeing up some PLG money to use for program and speaker sponsorship. In this initial submission, I introduce the workings and mission of the Alternatives Library and its fitting role as collaborator with the *Progressive Librarian*.

Stated simply, the mission of the Durland Alternatives Library (DAL) is to provide free and open access to materials expressing viewpoints and information not readily available through mainstream print publications and mass-media. The focus is on current issues and events as represented by alternative print and broadcast sources.

In 1974, the Anne Carry Durland Memorial Alternatives Library was founded and provided with funding by Lewis and Margaret Durland in memory of their daughter who was concerned with many of the social and environmental issues addressed by the library collection. Since its founding, the library has been housed in Anabel Taylor Hall on the Cornell University campus. There it has served continuously as an organizing and information center for social action as well as a resource center for its parent organization the Center for Religion, Ethics, and Social Policy (CRESP), a consortium for various projects working to address the social, environmental and educational problems of our times. Though the library is on the Cornell campus, it is an independent affiliate of the university and is open to the public as well as students.

As a rule, our collection supplements rather than duplicates materials

found in the academic and public libraries in our area and seeks to provide progressive viewpoints on a variety of issues. Though the collection is mainly non-fiction, we also maintain a small section of poetry and fiction including anthologies representing a diverse community of authors from around the world. Publications from alternative and independent sources make up the bulk of our holdings comprising books, AV materials and over 300 periodical titles currently available. All materials are arranged by categories similar to those found in bookstores. Because the collection is small, we have the flexibility of using our own call number and organization systems. This has been very popular with patrons who find the informal setup convenient and easy to understand. As a part of our work to make the library collection more widely available, we have established an affiliation agreement with the Finger Lakes Library System Interlibrary Loan Services so materials can be accessed readily throughout five counties in New York State.

In addition to offering a collection of materials reflecting alternative and progressive viewpoints, the DAL works with campus and community groups to provide AV and print materials for information programs on social issues such as the death penalty, inequities in the penal system, effects of mass media on culture, human rights, U.S. foreign policy and its consequences, and similar issues that either do not receive adequate coverage or that receive skewed or inaccurate coverage in mainstream media. Our work is motivated by a wish to give voice to under-represented peoples and viewpoints, and, to that end, we co-sponsor a number of speakers throughout the year.

As education budgets and particularly library budgets remain stagnant while prison funding escalates, we at the DAL feel increasing pressures to do whatever we can to make sure people have access to information regarding activities that directly effect their lives. At the DAL we take every opportunity to pool resources with a number of organizations that are feeling the money crunch. Together we are able to bring programs and speakers to our community that are not usually included in the university lecture circuit. Over the last year, the library helped to bring such people as G. Simon Harak, who traveled to Iraq with *Voices in the Wilderness*, in defiance of US/UN sanctions, to bring medical supplies and toys to Iraqi hospitals; Constancio Pinto, East Timorese resistance leader in the inde-

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pendence movement and author of *East Timor's Unfinished Struggle*, published by South End Press; and, most recently, Amy Goodman of Pacifica's Democracy Now who addressed concerns about the corporatization of news and the pressures on journalists to conform with an agenda promoting consumerism instead of information.

Besides cosponsoring speakers with local groups, library outreach to the community also includes rotating book collections that are sent from school to school within the district. School librarians and teachers are grateful to have these supplementary materials for use in curriculum design as well as collection development. Recent collections have included videotapes on particular topics. One that has been very well received – in fact, it hasn't been back to the Alternatives Library for almost 2 years – is *It's Elementary: Talking about Gay Issues in School*. This is the fourth year that we have sent out collections on Native America, ecology and diversity. By special request from the schools, we are developing a collection on the family and its many forms in today's world. Along with outreach to the schools, we are committed to reaching the many underserved populations in our area. In the works, is a new outreach project to target two of the local prisons that incarcerate juvenile offenders. Our main foes are ones that we all have in common — lack of time and staff.

All librarians have quite a task to fill in the void left by thinly veiled forms of censorship while struggling against the constant pressures to become inured to the consumer culture. Progressive and forward thinking librarians around the globe are feeling the frustration of their struggle against such overwhelming odds. This makes it increasingly necessary to keep professional communication channels open. The staff and advisory board of the Alternatives Library sees the *Progressive Librarian* as just such a means for us to discuss these issues, to offer each other ideas for solving problems that arise in our work, and to support each other in taking action against reductionistic positions regarding education and the dissemination of information. It is with warm regards that I salute all of you progressive librarians out there and with great pleasure that I join you in your work, struggles and sharing of ideas.

Lynn Andersen has been librarian and director of the Durland Alternatives Library, Cornell University campus, in Ithaca, NY, for over 8 years.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following piece is from the archives of progressive librarianship.

In fact, it's author, Henry Black (librarian of Commonwealth College), was one of a pioneer generation of progressive librarians who, most notably as organized in the distant predecessor organization of PLG, the Progressive Librarians Council, were active in the 1930s and 40s, and played a role in first sharply articulating debates in our profession about the social responsibilities of librarianship which still resonate today but which are seldom traced back further than the tumult of the 1960's.

The piece here reprinted, published in 1937, is an annotated bibliography with an introduction. It was distributed as a mimeographed, stapled booklet with a hand-stenciled cover, self-published by Black who took responsibility for the opinions expressed therein. It was meant to help promote librarians' familiarity with the "radical press," the then-current journals of the radical left. It helps illuminate the historic roots of today's arguments about the importance of the alternative press in libraries. For that reason alone it is valuable.

Some of the arguments and issues already delineated in Black's brief introduction, which we must remember was published, significantly enough, two years before ALA's adoption of the landmark "Library Bill of Rights," will seem eerily familiar and contemporary to most of our readers.

Surely the quirky partisanship of the annotations must be read as products of the highly charged political atmosphere of the 1930s with its various warring tendencies, a period, however, in which there was a mass "counter-public-sphere" of the left which, variegated and innovative, was a living popular, intellectual and institutional counter-culture, encompassing everything from fiction and poetry to film-making and photography, from dance, music and theater, to education and journalism, from co-ops and summer camps, to nightclubs and book clubs.

The memory of the progressive librarianship of the 30s and 40s was not openly available as a resource to the new radicals of librarianship who emerged in the 1960's to eventually form ALA's Social Responsibilities Round Table: it had been effaced by the 50s of McCarthyism and the witch-hunts, which rooted out every trace of radical librarians wherever they were found. Even in 1990 when PLG was founded we were unaware that we were, in effect, taking up a name which was so-closely connected to an organization from this earlier period which had a rich history of struggle within ALA.

We are reprinting Black's bibliography in this the 10th anniversary year of PLG's journal *Progressive Librarian*, as a reminder that the historical memory and continuity of radicalism in the profession is something which cannot be erased and which will reassert itself and rediscover itself anew as long as the same contradictions exist which prevent librarianship from fulfilling its social mission.

The copy of "Radical Periodicals and their Place in the Library" from which this is re-printed was discovered at the Reference Center for Marxist Studies, NYC. Mark Rosenzweig