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This issue of Progressive Librarian is the first published since the tragic, horrific events of September 11, 2001. Around the globe reactions to the terrorist acts of that day and to subsequent military and civil actions taken by the United States in its “war on terrorism” have varied widely. While there exists near unanimity that the accomplices and organizers of the terrorist attacks be brought to justice, ideas concerning the method for doing so are divergent. Surprising to many is the divergence of opinion concerning this matter found within the left, progressive community. September 11th has fissured the U.S. left in ways many of us never imagined and the Progressive Librarians Guild too has not been spared some of the aftershocks of that day. This divergence appears in the exchange published here between PL editors Mark Rosenzweig and John Buschman, who discuss the appropriateness of librarians taking a position on U.S. preparations for war.

Less contentious, thus far, is opposition to legislation and presidential executive orders aimed ostensibly at countering further terrorist acts and to the chilling effect these developments and military activities are having on our much coveted rights to freedom of expression and association. Most PLG members would agree with 300 law professors, for example, when they issued a statement characterizing President Bush’s order to establish secret military tribunals as “legally deficient, unnecessary and unwise.” Already some government information, once widely and freely accessible is being removed from depository libraries and websites. Under provisions of the recent USA PATRIOT Act libraries can be served secret warrants by the FBI, for confidential patron information, that needn’t reveal the names of individuals being investigated. Already blacklists are being compiled of those whose criticisms of U.S. foreign policy have been judged unpatriotic by an organization recently founded by Lynne Cheney and Senator Joseph Lieberman, and at least one tenured professor has been fired from his job because of ideas expressed concerning U.S. foreign policy. And U.S. citizens have experienced being blocked from crossing borders and
boarding airplanes, suffering unexpected consequences for expressing anti-war sentiments. So, the question will be asked, where is PLG’s “line in the sand” in our opposition to military solutions to political and economic problems and erosion to democratic rights? Wherever it is, we must join together to oppose measures that threaten civil liberties and to fight the co-opting of libraries and librarians into the propagandistic, you’re-either-with-us-or-you’re-with-the-terrorists campaign in the U.S. government’s Wild West approach to global problems.

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Nobel Prize, one-hundred Nobel laureates issued a statement expressing grave concern over ever-increasing inequities between rich and poor and the environmental degradation of the planet. “The only hope for the future lies in co-operative international action, legitimized by democracy. It is time to turn our backs on the unilateral search for security, in which we seek to shelter behind walls. Instead, we must persist in the quest for united action to counter both global warming and a weaponized world.” This is a progressive statement and a much-needed call to reason. PLG’s new Coordinating Committee has been convened to formulate actions and positions informed by a vision which sees librarianship as an ally of democracy, peaceful change, environmentalism, and a fair distribution of resources among all the world’s people. Now, more than ever librarianship needs an organization like PLG that is unafraid to “speak truth to power.”

Elaine Harger


Librarians or Dissidents?: Critics and Supporters of the Independent Libraries in Cuba Project

by Stuart Hamilton

In February 1998, after Fidel Castro stated “In Cuba there are no prohibited books, only those we do not have money to buy,” Berta Mexidor, an economist from the Las Tunas province, inaugurated the Independent Libraries in Cuba Project. The project aimed to form independent libraries, as opposed to the official libraries of Cuba run by the government, which would give Cuban readers unrestricted access to books, magazines, documents and other publications not provided by state institutions. This report looks at the origins of this movement, its supporters and detractors, and the future prospects for a project that has been criticised by the Cuban authorities, among others, as being funded by the US government in order to undermine the current regime’s authority. It shall do this through an examination of existing documentation relating to the project and those connected with it, and also from information collected during fieldwork at 3 independent libraries in Havana between the 24th and 30th May 2001. The report will argue that the independent libraries, whose existence demonstrates a desire for materials on the part of the Cuban people and a perceived failure on the part of the Cuban library service, constitute a network of dissidents whose claims to be politically neutral are tainted by the connections of some of their supporters.

Cuba, the largest island in the Caribbean, has been under the control of Fidel Castro’s Cuban Communist Party (PCC) since Castro led a rebel army to victory over the Batista regime in 1959. July 2001 estimates put its population at 11,184,023. The state, which has been under pressure from the US embargo that began in 1961 after the revolution, has seen many changes in the 42 years of Castro’s rule. The Cuban economy was aided by Soviet support during the 1960s, 70s and 80s but the withdrawal of aid in 1990 after the collapse of the former Soviet Union led to a severe recession. The “special period,” the term Cubans use to describe the hard times after the removal of aid, began to ease after
Castro introduced market-led reforms of the agricultural markets in 1994, along with measures promoting a certain amount of self-employment. In the past few years the economy has maintained varying levels of growth, mostly due to the influence of tourism upon the island, although the effects of the US embargo are ongoing.²

**Education and Literacy in Cuba**

One of the successes of the Cuban revolution has been the education of the people. Castro came to power with low literacy rates that were turned around by a movement of teachers that went into the countryside and improved the literacy of the majority of the rural population. Today, Cuba has the highest literacy rate in the Americas and one of the highest in the world with 2000 figures showing that 95.7% of the total population are literate³.

The school system is also unrivalled in the Caribbean, with 98% of the population having received at least an 8th grade education⁴. This is a result of a high educational budget that lends itself to the highest index of teachers per capita in the world⁵. This education system, which has been free to all for forty years, has produced over 500,000 university graduates, 200,000 teachers and professors and over 11,000 scientists, out of a population of just over 11 million. Ruiz calculates that Cuba is ranked as one of the richest nations of the world for scientific postgraduates per capita⁶. However, while these figures translate as a success story it is also the case that support for equipment and teaching materials is lacking in many areas of the education sector.

**The National Library Service**

Cuba’s well-organised libraries provide services to thousands of people every day. The island’s 391 public libraries — one for every 26,000 people⁷ — provide materials to many different types of users and are complemented by school, university and special libraries. Cuba embarked upon a programme of library building between 1980-1991 that saw the reconstruction of old libraries and the opening of new buildings, but this period came to an end with the withdrawal of Soviet funding. Recent times have seen the programme begin again however, with 16 libraries under renovation and 12 new libraries under construction⁸.

At the top of the Cuban library system is the National Library, the Biblioteca Nacional José Marti, which maintains a collection of approximately 3,000,000 items. It was founded in 1901 by order of the military American governor. Alongside its national library functions it is also head of the public library service. It has its own budget, decides all library matters and is responsible for special collections such as materials from before the revolution.

The system is structured so that each of the country’s 14 provinces contains a main library that works closely with the National Library. Beneath this are the municipal libraries which might be compared to a county library in the UK, each of which have branches responsible to them. These institutions exist in each of the country’s 169 municipalities and co-operation between branches is an important feature of the service. The co-operation between the public sector and the educational and special libraries is also important to recognise.

Each public library aims to provide an adult reading room, a reference area, a children’s room, card catalogue, processing area and staff room⁹. Users request titles after consulting the card catalogue, filling out details on a form and then waiting for library staff to retrieve the titles from a closed stack area. A closed stack is in operation in most of Cuba’s libraries although in some libraries it is possible to browse. Staff are available at all service points to assist with enquires and in 1999 Cuban libraries dealt with 6,501,700 library users and provided 9,697,800 services¹⁰.

Current computing resources are poor quality and antiquated but staff in most libraries have at least one computer to help them with their work. At present Internet access is limited in public libraries, and it is certainly expensive at the places that do have it¹¹. Automation in the National Library and the provincial and major city libraries is being rolled out and this is necessary before universal Internet access in the library service can become reality. At present, however, there is no timeline for implementing Internet access in every library¹².

**The Situation Facing the Library Service**

Despite the literate library users, the numbers of people training to become librarians and the recent resurgence in library renovation and building, Cuba’s libraries are facing strong challenges. Visitors to Cuba’s libraries comment on the condition of the books — old, heavily used and in a delicate state due to the temperature and humidity. Few titles have been
purchased since 1991 and the economic circumstances the country finds itself in as a result of the withdrawal of Soviet aid and the US embargo mean that library budgets are small. This leads to under-developed collections, services and preservation programmes. Office supplies are scarce and an antiquated telecommunications network hampers the provision of new services such as Internet access.

Cuba’s publishing industry was also hard hit by the loss of Soviet funding, and while it is recovering today it still suffers from short print runs and fewer new titles or journal issues. The four publishing houses that operate in Cuba have increased their output since the stagnation at the beginning of the 1990s but the cost of paper is still very expensive as the embargo prevents its purchase from the US. It is now being imported from Australia at a very high cost. The lack of titles impacts upon the books on library shelves as copies of every title published should be deposited in each of the provincial libraries.

Cuba’s libraries manage to achieve a great deal despite their situation. They undertake the same tasks and responsibilities as their colleagues all over the world — developing collections, preserving materials, developing staff knowledge and education, and educating users in new methods of information retrieval — and they do so against a background of tight budgets and limited resources. Despite this the staff, by the admission of international colleagues who have visited and examined the libraries, remain courteous, professional and committed to their activities within and outside of the library buildings.

Freedom of Expression and Access to Information

It is possible to lose sight of the work being carried out in Cuba’s libraries in the mire that is the human rights situation in the country. It is important for this report to consider the situation as it is impossible to examine the independent libraries without being aware of what is currently taking place in Cuba. Human rights abuses have been the subject of numerous reports by global organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Pax Christi, and the oppression of Cuba’s independent journalists is also closely monitored by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Human Rights Watch asserts:

Over the past forty years, Cuba has developed a highly effective machinery of repression. The denial of basic civil and political rights is written in Cuban law. In the name of legality, armed security forces, aided by state-controlled mass organisations, silence dissent with heavy prison terms, threats of prosecution, harassment or exile. Cuba uses these tools to severely restrict the exercise of fundamental human rights of expression, association and assembly.

It is undeniable that there are consequences for political dissidents in Cuba. Anyone trying to undermine the government will be targeted by the authorities and prosecuted under a harsh 1999 law that imposes long jail terms for subversive activities. What constitutes undermining is determined by the government itself, leading to a situation where anyone from independent journalists to public critics of the system can be imprisoned arbitrarily. Dissident groups are attacked in the state media and portrayed as being in the pay of US authorities bent on overthrowing the government. The authorities use a variety of tactics to silence opposition, including short-term detentions, official warnings, removal from jobs, eviction, surveillance (including the tapping of telephones), harassment, intimidation and forced exile.

Human rights activists and independent journalists frequently bear the brunt of the government’s scrutiny as it is these groups who are highlighting the abuses in the system, primarily to an international audience. The international community has voiced its opposition through the United Nations Human Rights Commission by consistently passing resolutions condemning rights violations, yet the Cuban authorities routinely ban human rights and humanitarian agencies from entering the country to assess the situation.

Opposition in Cuba

Despite the risks of the government’s wrath, there are still committed opponents of the regime who are struggling to introduce democracy to the country. The democracy movement in Cuba has grown steadily since the early 1990s and, while it is still by necessity underground, it has come a long way since the first organisations sprang up inside the country’s prisons. Now, thanks in some part to the visible influence of tourism and the return of Cubans who witnessed the end of communism in Europe, organisations working for democracy have spread all over the country with some political parties and trade unions boasting hundreds of members each.

One of the largest opposition parties is the liberal Partido Solidaridad
Democrática (PSD) which has approximately 2000 members all over Cuba and maintains an organised structure that keeps its branches across the country informed of events. It actively attempts to bring smaller democratic groups under its wing through the organisation of small seminars to communicate its ideals. The other major liberal party on the island is the Partido Liberal Democratico de Cuba (PLDC) which shares a lot of ideology with the PSD. Both parties would like to see the embargo lifted. The PLDC is more loosely organised than the PSD and tries to attract young people and students while at the same time vigorously screening members to avoid government infiltration. They believe the best way to achieve democracy is through a referendum, whereas the PSD wants gradual changes to the system of government.

Perhaps the most stable pro-democracy movement in Cuba contains the PSD but is also an umbrella for other political parties such as the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats, along with various civil organisations. The Reflexion de la Oposicion Moderada (MROM) is a common democratic platform for the peaceful transition to democracy, and its objective is to create a dialogue with the current regime that will facilitate reforms in the way Cuba is governed. At present the government refuses to recognise MROM and so the organisation continues its activities — like the drafting of a Cuban declaration of human rights or the seeking of relations with pro-democracy activists in the rest of the world — knowing that its members are regarded as dissidents in the eyes of the government.

Access to Information in Cuba

The members of the underground opposition parties face constant scrutiny from the authorities for their anti-government views. However, at the same time as enforcing a crackdown on dissidents the government is also accused of preventing ordinary Cubans accessing information. Independent news agencies are banned, and journalists who report stories contrary to the official line reported in the state newspaper, Granma, are likely to be victimised. As a result of this anti-government stories are normally found in newspapers and journals published abroad, as journalists go underground to send stories out to foreign sympathisers via telephone. Miami in Florida is the centre of anti-Castro publishing activity, with papers such as Nueva Prensa containing articles critical of the regime.

Ordinary Cubans are also denied access to foreign television and radio channels, and the government blocks transmissions from Radio Marti, a pro-U.S./anti-Castro propaganda radio station based in Miami. Other technologies, such as the Internet, are more difficult to control but the government is trying. The state controls the only Internet gateway and the four national Internet Service Providers. Out of 11 million Cubans only 40,000 people are allowed Internet access and email accounts, and most of these people are academics or government workers. Enteprising ordinary Cubans can access the net at university, via the black market in passwords or use email by borrowing foreign friend's accounts, but they run the risk of surveillance by the authorities at all times.

Despite this, more journalists are turning to the net as a means of getting their message out to interested parties overseas. There are two main websites that carry articles from independent journalists (the Miami-based Cubanet and CubaFreePress) but, while those involved in posting reports to these sites may face repercussions, it is unlikely many ordinary Cubans would ever see these articles due to the paucity of places offering access and prohibitive costs. This lack of access is due to the government's policy of granting access only to "entities and institutions most relevant to the country's life and development." As a result of this policy individuals at home are almost never granted Internet access and it is left to institutions such as universities, some places of employment and, in the near future, libraries to provide connection facilities. At the same time as controlling access points, the Cuban government is also developing a national Intranet which would allow access to web pages hosted in Cuba and national email but not to external sites thus in effect continuing a policy of information censorship.

It is government actions like this that has led some critics of the regime to include libraries as one part of the state's plan to control the flow of information within Cuba. Critics of the public library system point to the unavailability of certain titles, such as George Orwell's 1984, the works of exiled poet Reinaldo Arenas or novelist Guillermo Cabrera Infante, on library shelves as an example of the government's commitment to withholding anything that might constitute criticism of the regime. Certainly there are few new titles on the shelves of Cuba's public libraries which could be taken as a sign that the library system has no interest in offering the latest information to its users. Planned Internet access will be closely monitored by observers of Cuba's human rights despite Cuban Library Association President Marta Terry's statement that with regards to filtering Internet content the only type of filter that works is conscience.
The Independent Libraries in Cuba Project

The Cuban government has always refuted suggestions of censorship existing in its library service. A case in point was Castro's statement at the book fair in Havana in February 1998 that: "In Cuba there are no prohibited books, only those we do not have money to buy."31

After hearing this remark, Berta del Carmen Mexidor Vazquez, an economist from the province of Las Tunas, along with her husband, Ramon Humberto Colas, began plans for an independent library that would grant access to publications unavailable in the state libraries. On March 13, 1998 the first independent library was opened in Las Tunas under the supervision of Ms. Mexidor. By September 1999 there were 18 independent libraries in the country and in May 2001 the number had increased significantly to 82.32 The project is supported by an organisational structure that includes a director, assistant director, co-ordinator, public relations representative, secretary and 10 provincial co-ordinators.33

Those involved in the project are intellectuals, artists or have been involved in anti-government acts such as activities within various opposition parties or independent journalism. Most of the participants are activists of some description and are forthcoming with this information which can be found on the Cubanet website.34 The directors of each library, or "independent librarians" as they have become known, are united by a core principal, namely that the intention of the project is to "promote reading not as a mere act of receiving understanding, but to form an opinion which is individually arrived at without censorship nor obligation to one belief."35

An article written by Berta Mexidor for IFLA/FAIFE's 1999 report on independent libraries describes the project's aims and objectives in more detail. Taking as a starting point the perceived official censorship that forces Cubans to satisfy their intellectual curiosity via the black market, the project sets out to provide a legal framework that will "encourage in practice the development of a civil society without ideological constraints that would reach for its true and just worth based on legitimacy, self-respect and authority."36 This will be achieved by providing scientific, technical, cultural and general information to all Cubans who are interested through a network of libraries that spans the country. Libraries will co-operate to exchange bibliographic material they would not have access to in the public library service, and the project will endeavour to support and stimulate learning among all users of the libraries through lectures and activities.

The independent libraries are, in effect, collections of anywhere between a couple of hundred to a couple of thousand books that are displayed in an individual's home. The collections may contain anything from the director's personal collection to a collection consisting of donations from friends, family or from individuals abroad. Most contentious, however, is the support received from the US government which supplies aid in the form of books delivered to the independent libraries by its Interest Section in Havana (there is no US Embassy in Cuba). Often the collections are in a poor state, similar to those found in the public libraries, although new titles donated from abroad can be found amongst the older books.

The level of organisation within each library differs, with some libraries attempting to classify their collections and operate circulation records while in others the library is simply the owner's books on shelves. Due to the anti-government nature of the project, the libraries are not publicised through any means other than word of mouth, on the Internet, or through broadcasts from the Miami-based Radio Marti. Despite this use is frequent, something that has contributed to the rapid spread of the project across the country.37

The project also seeks to offer more than books for loan. In the past year the movement has organised literary events featuring poems, awards and readings that attracted over 100 people. Alongside events such as these are programs such as drawing classes for children, and some independent libraries specialise in children's and teen collections.38

The Cuban government opposes the independent libraries project, claiming that the majority of the people involved are active members of opposition political parties who receive money from abroad, most notably from Miami-based exile groups.39 The independent librarians have claimed to have been intimidated, harassed, detained for varying periods of time and even evicted from their homes as a result of their activities.40 This has led to international condemnation of their treatment by groups such as The Friends of Cuban Libraries (FCL) and IFLA. The matter of external support clouds the whole issue of the independent libraries and while the founders of the movement deny they have political motives they do acknowledge that the US government helps the libraries with book donations. The majority of their financial support, they say, comes from private contributors and a large amount of these are co-ordinated by the London-based Guillermo Cabrera Infante, an author who has won Spain's Cervantes literary award.41
Certainly the issue of the independent libraries project cannot be examined without extensive reference to the situation Cuba finds itself in as a result of its decades long strained relations with the U.S. Since 1961 the US government has imposed an embargo upon the island. Any US funding that does make it through to the independent libraries is certain to antagonise the Cuban government and transform the project into a political beast whether the founders of the movement intended it that way or not.

Despite the US embargo's formal exclusion of information materials from what can and cannot be traded with Cuba, there can be no doubt that it has led to severe economic difficulties in the country, and in the library service in particular. The purchase of paper for book production is hampered by a lack of hard currency and materials needed for preservation of books are unavailable. Importers of foreign books face a 40% tax which leads to a lack of new books and reference materials in both print and electronic formats. Travel restrictions mean that Cubans cannot travel to the U.S. to exchange information and undertake professional development, and US citizens wishing to travel to Cuba to 'make contact with their opposites in the Cuban library world, for example, have to receive special dispensation from the US government. Donations of books from the US, meanwhile, have to go through a third country — an unorthodox route that does nothing to improve information supply. New technologies, such as the Internet, are affected by Cuba's inability to afford information technology, leaving the country's literate population unable to take advantage of new communication methods. Cuba is unable to communicate on an international scale in the way it might without the barriers the embargo throws up.

The continuing embargo and its affects on the trade of food, medicine, books and information has led to international condemnation that has done little to bring an end to the situation. Despite the United Nations' continuing official condemnation of the embargo over the last decade (in 1998 157 countries voted to condemn the embargo. Only the US and Israel voted to support it) the US government has refused to shift its position. In 1992 it brought into force the Cuban Democracy Act, or the Torricelli Act, which tightened the embargo further with regards to food and medicine and provided a new "track" to fund anti-government organisations. In 1996 the US went even further when it passed the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (LIBERTAD) Act, also known as the Helms-Burton Act, which increased the aid to anti-government groups and brought into place further restrictions on travel, among them the threat of fines for Americans travelling to Cuba. By far the most controversial piece of legislation in the act however, was the proviso that US companies could sue foreign companies that work with the Cuban government. This, more than anything else, provoked international outrage as the law blatantly violated international treaties the US was obliged to adhere to. Lawrence Eagleburger, a Democrat senator opposed to the act, called it "an imperial policy."

The track of the Helms-Burton act that would allow US companies to sue their foreign counterparts has been waived every six months by President Clinton and now President Bush as a result of this outrage but recently the US has tried again to go further in its efforts to fund democratic groups in Cuba. The proposed Helms-Lieberman act aims to increase the amount of funding available to opposition and non-governmental groups to $100 million over four years in cash, food, medicine, telecommunications equipment, office supplies and educational material. At present the legislation is stalled following the defection of a Republican senator needed to carry the bill forward. The Cuban government ironically welcomed the proposal, which some commentators saw as unsurprising given that it is seen to justify its actions towards its opponents by portraying them as agents of the US.

It is very difficult to de-Americanize the issues of freedom in Cuba because of the long standing embargo. With regards to the independent libraries, the issue of support and funding, through such legislation as the Torricelli and Helms-Burton Acts, becomes highly politicised. As a result of this the debate around the issue has become passionate and personal, and it shows no signs of abating two years after it began.

The Debate

Since the first press release from a group calling itself the Friends of Cuban Libraries (FCL) was circulated via email to numerous listservs and message boards in the library world on June 8 1999, attention has been drawn to the continuing situation involving the independent libraries in Cuba. Robert Kent, the New York public librarian responsible for posting the press release, announced that FCL would be undertaking a campaign opposing the "systematic harassment and arrest of independent Cuban librarians and the confiscation of their book collections." Perhaps understandably this statement immediately began to inflame passions among librarians contributing to various message boards, such as the ALA Office for Intellectual
and over the past two years the debate has seethed back and forth across the Internet between librarians passionately concerned about censorship in all its forms.

News of the campaign by FCL eventually reached the highest offices of the library world, and the Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) committee of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) issued a report on the subject in September 1999. Despite the report’s condemnation of the alleged harassment of Cuban librarians the issue was not considered closed by many who had followed the debate, and since the FAIFE report was published there have been many pieces written by librarians, the majority of them from the U.S., refuting the claims of FCL and the FAIFE report.

The debate raging between librarians such as Robert Kent and Ann Sparanese, a New Jersey public librarian, was picked up by online and print journals such as Library Juice, Impact and the IFLA Journal. The dispute came to a head when FCL sought the support of the American Library Association (ALA) at their midwinter conference on January 8, 2001. Both FCL and their opponents, represented by Ann Sparanese and Rhonda Neugebauer, a librarian at Wichita State University, brought their cases before a meeting of the Latin American Subcommittee of ALA’s International Relations Committee (IRC) [see Documents].

After considering the two points of view the IRC’s LA Subcommittee rejected the appeal of FCL and took no action save a condemnation of any attempts to block the flow between nations such as the embargo imposed on Cuba by the US and censorship within Cuba itself. It also recommended closer ties between existing professional associations such as the ALA and the Cuban Library Association (ASCUBI) as a mechanism for development.

Despite this setback FCL have continued with their campaign to win recognition for the cause of the independent librarians. They have continued to produce and publicise the cause through their online newsletter, and supporters lobbied ALA members who recently attended the ACURIL (Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries) conference in Havana in May 2001 to highlight the issue in discussion with Cuban librarians.

At the same time as the conference there were also members of the US press in Cuba investigating the independent libraries. The press have become increasingly aware of the issue over the past twelve months, albeit mostly in the U.S., and recent articles about the libraries have been found in the New York and Los Angeles Times, the Boston Globe and the Chronicle of Higher Education. At the same time, websites such as Cubanet continue to publicise the issue as they have consistently done over the past two years.

Despite the best efforts of ALA this issue will not go away. The recent visit to ACURIL in Cuba by an ALA/IFLA delegation resulted in two reports which are about to be published, and a discussion panel has been convened at IFLA 2001 in Boston where the main players in the debate will put across their points of view. In light of the ongoing discussion it is highly important that this report examines the supporters and detractors of the independent libraries and their motivations in defending or attacking the movement.

Cuba’s Independent Librarians: Their Supporters

The Friends of Cuban Libraries

Foremost among the supporters of the independent libraries are the Friends of Cuban Libraries (FCL). FCL was founded on June 1, 1999 and its press releases declare that it is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit organisation that supports Cuba’s independent libraries. FCL opposes censorship and all other violations of intellectual freedom as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, regardless of the ideology or leadership of whatever Cuban government is in office.

FCL aims to encourage librarians everywhere to defend their Cuban counterparts by bringing the issue to the attention of the international library bodies. By using emailed newsletters and postings on listservs FCL is able to highlight abuses against the independent librarians while at the same time maintaining a criticism of the Cuban government, something that has led observers to question their supposed non-partisanship.

The founders of FCL are Robert Kent and Jorge Sanguinetti. Robert Kent is a New York librarian with a special interest in Cuba and has visited the country many times. His biography on the press release that accompanied the start of FCL’s campaign declares:

During his visits to Cuba Robert Kent has assisted Cuban, American, and internationally-based human rights organisations with deliveries of medicines, small sums of money, and
other forms of humanitarian aid. On four occasions he has taken books and pamphlets to Cuba for Freedom House and the Center for a Free Cuba (sic), human rights organisations which have received publication grants from the U.S. Agency for International Development; on three occasions his travel expenses were paid wholly or in part by Freedom House or the Center for a Free Cuba. On his last trip to Cuba in February, 1999, Kent was arrested and deported from the country.59

Jorge Sanguinetti’s biography states that he resides in Miami and “was the head of Cuba’s Department of National Investment Planning before he left the country in 1967. He was later associated with the Brookings Institution and the UN Development Programme. He is the founder and president of Devtech, Inc. He is also a newspaper columnist and a commentator on Radio Marti.”60 Mr Sanguinetti is also a speaker on returning the free market to Cuba and is against the lifting of the U.S. embargo on the grounds that this would give more power to the Castro regime.

Both men’s backgrounds and positions warrant further investigation, especially as FCL claims to be an independent and non-partisan organisation. To do so their connections with institutions openly mentioned in FCL press releases, such as Freedom House, The Center for a Free Cuba, Radio Marti and the U.S. Agency for International Development must be questioned and, in turn, the significance of these organisations in the wider picture of the U.S.’s relationship with Cuba can be considered.

U.S. Non-governmental Organisations

Freedom House and the Center for a Free Cuba (CFC) are non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that receive significant U.S. government funding through the Torricelli act and its descendants.61 Freedom House was founded by Eleanor Roosevelt 60 years ago to promote democratic values, oppose dictatorships and espouse the view that “American leadership in international affairs is essential to the cause of human rights and freedom.”62 It is currently upholding these ideals through a series of projects in countries and subject fields it feels needs help to achieve democracy. The Cuban Democracy Project, begun in January 1999, is one such scheme. This program “strengthens the capacity of democratic activists and organisations by providing training and education, material support, and personal links to counterparts from Central and Eastern Europe.”63

CFC is a similar organisation to Freedom House, declaring itself to be “an independent, non-partisan institution dedicated to promoting human rights and a transition to democracy and the rule of law on the island.”64 It is primarily a gatherer and broadcaster of information about Cuba to the international community, but it also runs programs on the island itself to promote democracy.

The Cuban authorities are well aware of Freedom House’s activities within their country, with the party daily newspaper, Granma, detailing U.S. government grants totalling $500,000 to the organisation to provide dissidents with computers.65 Freedom House and CFC have received nearly $2,000,000 from the U.S. government between 1996 and 2000, while the Cuban Democracy Project has received $825,000 since its inception.66

Organisations such as CFC and activities such as the Cuban Democracy Project are ideal recipients of funding from the Torricelli and Helms-Burton acts. Despite Freedom House’s assertion that it is a non-partisan organisation its major support is provided by, amongst others, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the National Endowment for Democracy and the U.S. Information Agency.67 These large agencies dedicated to the promotion of U.S. interests and their connections with the U.S.’s declared intention to promote democratic change in Cuba must also be considered if the role of FCL in this wider picture is to be properly understood.

The Miami Cubans, Cubanet and their Backers

Cuba has been high on the U.S. political agenda since the U.S. backed Batista regime was removed from power in Castro’s revolution of 1959. Many thousands of wealthy Cubans fled the island to the safety of Miami and watched as the new government nationalised their assets and took their land. As a result of this the pressure placed on the U.S. government by the exiled Cubans to remedy this situation has never gone away, as demonstrated by the continuing embargo and the tightening procedures brought in by the Torricelli and Helms-Burton acts.

As mentioned previously the aim of the exiled Cubans is to return to their homeland, take back their property and “return” democracy to the country in a peaceful transition.68 The exiles’ base is Miami, and from here efforts are made to keep in touch with relatives in Cuba through a variety of means. As mentioned earlier, the Cuban government controls the media in the country to the extent that independent news agencies are forbidden. In
response to this the Miami Cubans and the U.S. government set up Radio Marti in 1985, a radio station broadcasting news, music, shows and features on the U.S. 24-hours a day, 7 days a week from Miami to Cuba. Radio Marti is supposed to broadcast accurate, objective and balanced information to Cuba,69 but its impartiality has been questioned by people who see it as a U.S. advertising tool, flooding Cuban airwaves with articles about the benefits of life in the free U.S. compared with socialist Cuba.70 Mark Rosenzweig, co-editor of the journal Progressive Librarian calls it a "U.S. propaganda outlet, pure and simple."71

It is against this background of propaganda that Cubanet, the source that FCL uses for its information on the situation facing Cuba’s independent libraries must be considered. Radio Marti is funded by the U.S. Information Agency's International Broadcasting Bureau,72 and Cubanet is also backed by agencies connected to the government. Its website states it to be a "tax exempt, non partisan and non-profit organisation that fosters free press in Cuba, assists its independent sector develop a civil society and informs the world about Cuba’s reality."73 Cubanet posts reports on its website from independent journalists on the island and its news section is updated daily to help the journalists report the non-governmental version of the events and daily life in Cuba. It also hosts official information on the Independent Libraries Project in Cuba and as a result FCL refers to the site regularly.74

Cubanet is based in Coral Gables, Florida, and its website reports that it is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Open Society Institute and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and private donors, "including two very special anonymous ones."75 The contributions to the independent libraries debate from Ann Sparanese and John Pateman of the Cuban Libraries Support Group has focused on these institutions and their objectives as a way of discovering the real motivations behind FCL.76 They both point to NED and the Open Society Institute as institutions that support a number of anti-Cuban government enterprises, while Sparanese calls NED a “quasi U.S. government institution."77

Certainly the NED does not hide its support of Cubanet and its aim of promoting an independent civil society in Cuba.78 USAID also makes clear the organisations it backs on its website. Helping NGOs to bring about democracy in Cuba is one of its major projects and its website makes clear it is funding these organisations in line with the legislation contained in the Torricelli and Helms-Burton acts79. It has a huge budget to fulfil its aims and this totalled over $10,000,000 in 2000-2001, with Freedom House receiving $500,000, CFC receiving $1,450,000, Freedom House’s Cuban Democracy Project receiving $825,000 and Cubanet receiving $343,000.80 More intriguing and open to speculation are the two very special anonymous donors mentioned on the Cubanet website. Sparanese suggests these might include members of the Cuban National American Foundation (CANF) while Pateman is certain of it.81 CANF, founded in 1981, is the wealthy and powerful voice of right-wing Cuban exiles in Florida and carries substantial weight in U.S. politics. It has large money reserves through the contributions of over 50,000 wealthy members and carries an administrative budget of approximately $1,500,000 per year. These resources have enabled the organisation to lobby hard in Congress for tough actions against Castro’s regime such as the continuation of the embargo.

CANF carries with it accusations of violence and intimidation of those opposed to the embargo within the Cuban exile community. In 1992 Americas Watch, a division of Human Rights Watch, issued a report damning CANF for creating a “repressive climate for freedom of expression” in which Miami Cubans opposed to the embargo were subjected to “bombings, vandalism, beatings and death threats” from members of the organisation.82 The organisation has recently switched its tactics from lobbying Congress for action on their Cuban concerns to funding dissident groups on the island. This action is in line with the current U.S. government policy as outlined in the Helms-Burton and proposed Helms-Lieberman acts. In September 2000 the organisation announced it would be quadrupling the amount of money it sends to dissidents and that this money would begin trickling into the island via sympathisers in the following year.83

On examination of the connections groups such as the CANF, USAID and the NED have with Cubanet it is clear that the information FCL is getting from this source is connected with organisations that have vested interests in U.S. government policy. As a result of this it is possible to question the objectivity, especially in light of the criticisms levelled at other information sources such as Radio Marti, of Cubanet and therefore FCL with regards to the situation in Cuba. On top of this, Robert Kent’s involvement with groups such as Freedom House and CFC who are funded by organisations such as USAID leave FCL’s objectives open to further scrutiny. Claims of independence and non-partisanship are difficult to uphold in light of actions undertaken with these groups and it must be assumed that FCL is somehow connected to an agenda in line with the sections of the Torricelli and Helms-Burton acts that fund NGOs in Cuba opposed to the government.
Other Supporters of the Independent Libraries

It has been pointed out that the accusations levelled at FCL are lacking substance and are merely postings by librarians guilty about past US subversion and exile group terrorism. Steve Marquadt, Dean of Libraries at South Dakota State University, also believes the connections made between groups such as USAID and CANF are simply opponents of FCL implying guilt by association. It should be remembered, despite FCL’s connections to the groups detailed above, they are not the only group that have been attempting to draw attention to the situation facing the Independent Libraries in Cuba Project.

The independent libraries have been frequently discussed within the international library community over the last two years. As FCL’s postings brought the issue to the attention of more librarians around the globe calls were made for an official investigation into whether or not librarians in Cuba were being persecuted by the government. In September 1999 the Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) committee of IFLA published a report regarding the situation facing the independent libraries in Cuba. The report, brought about after FCL made public the alleged abuses against librarians, spoke with Robert Kent, Marta Terry of ASCUBI, and with representatives of the independent libraries by telephone. It sought further general information from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Reporters sans Frontiers. While acknowledging Cuba’s achievements in library development, it recommended that the government put an end to the intimidation of the independent librarians.

The reports from human rights groups consulted by FAIFE do mention abuses against independent librarians. The Vatican covered the harassment of librarians in an October 2000 report that commented on the prohibition of certain printed materials in Cuba. In their 2000 report on the country, covering the period January to December 1999, Amnesty International mentions the eviction of Berta Mexidor and Ramon Colas, the founders of the independent library movement, from their home in Las Tunas province. The report goes on to say “Other independent librarians were also subjected to threats, short-term detentions and the confiscation of their books,” although no names, places or dates are mentioned. Their 2001 report does not mention independent librarians.

Alongside criticism from global human rights organisations there has also been commentary on the issue in the U.S. press. Pieces on the independent libraries have been run in publications such as the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Boston Globe and the Chronicle of Higher Education. These pieces have taken a near uniform view, that the independent librarians of Cuba are being punished by the authorities for providing books that are unavailable on public library shelves. They detail the types of books available in the public libraries, such as Orwell’s Animal Farm and 1984, and report on the harassment and intimidation suffered by those who are involved in the project.

There has also been interest in the issue from European countries over the last two years. In the Netherlands the Dutch National Union of Librarians (NVB) urged the Netherlands government representative to discuss the independent libraries with Cuban officials during an official visit to the island at the end of 1999. Sweden however, has taken most interest in the issue. The Swedish International Liberal Centre (SILC) has been in active contact with liberal opposition parties and independent journalists in Cuba since 1998, and has sent representatives to the island to foster contact between the two countries. As a result, Swedish journalists have come into contact with independent librarians and publicised the issue in their home press. Fredrik Malm, a visitor who met with about 20 independent librarians in June 2001, reported that books were being confiscated from the libraries and the independent librarians were being denied employment on account of their activities. In February, a Swedish member of the European Parliament, Cecilia Malmstrom from the Swedish Liberal Party, visited two libraries and urged the European Union to send aid to the project. Ms. Malmstrom and Peter Isling, the co-author of her report on the visit, are to convene a seminar in the European Parliament this autumn regarding the EU’s relationship with Cuba. In the meantime, SILC are distributing 600-1000 books to the independent libraries in the coming year.

The attitude of the Swedish liberal party towards the independent libraries is one of fostering democracy as opposed to FCL’s stance of opposing censorship and violations of intellectual freedom. The Swedes are open in what they are trying to do, namely bringing liberal parties from different countries into contact with each other to discuss ideas and further democ-
racy. They see the independent libraries as part of the democratic movement and therefore a political animal. Cecilia Malmström stresses the need for the issue to be de-Americanized — that the embargo and the U.S.’s issues with Fidel Castro have occupied too much time in the debate to the detriment of what the Swedes see as the fundamental issue: the transition to democracy in Cuba.

FCL, on the other hand, claim they are non-political and indeed refrain from commenting on political issues. This position, when considered alongside the connections to U.S.-affiliated organisations interested in funding opponents of the Castro regime, has led to condemnation of FCL and, by association, the Independent Libraries in Cuba Project by vocal opponents who are equally as determined as Robert Kent to get their position heard.

**Cuba’s Independent Librarians: Their Detractors**

ASCUBI and the Cuban Government

If the allegations being made by FCL carry substance the first people to refute them would be the Cuban library authorities. Following the publication of the 1999 IFLA/FAIFE report, ASCUBI responded to the claims of arrests, book confiscations and harassment by producing a statement for IFLA/FAIFE. In it Marta Terry, President, gave details of an investigation by ASCUBI into the independent librarians, who were hitherto unknown to them, and concluded, after contacts with the authorities, that none of the people mentioned in the report were subject to arrest or imprisonment. This, however, was all that was said about the independent libraries and the remainder of the text detailed the achievements of the Cuban library service since Castro came to power. Supposedly the report from ASCUBI was a preliminary one, and there was to be more information forthcoming on the subject. To date, however, nothing official has been seen from ASCUBI since the September 1999 report.

The Cuban library authorities have always been quick to refute accusations of censorship in their libraries. The current director of the National Library, Eliades Acosta, has spoken out many times against the effects on the U.S. embargo on the purchasing capabilities of the library system. Librarians interviewed by visitors have stated that it is restrictions on purchasing due to lack of funds that leads to a shortage of books on the shelves of Cuba’s libraries, not a policy of censorship on the part of the Cuban library authorities. The Cuban Writers and Artists Union, UNEAC, have pointed out that some key authors, such as Infante, Jorge Manach or Aenas, are missing from library shelves due to their insistence that their works are not published in Cuba. Turning the tables on FCL, Acosta has asked about the lack of Cuban publications on the shelves of U.S. libraries considering the budgets available to librarians in America. Dale Vidar, a librarian who visited Cuba’s libraries in April 2000 wondered if this was the real reason behind his limited knowledge of the country and its culture.

The Cuban Libraries Support Group

Cuba’s libraries also have defenders abroad. The Cuban Libraries Support Group (CLSG) was formed shortly after FCL on July 1, 1999. Following the beginnings of the debate between Robert Kent and various librarians on library listservs and message boards John Pateman, Head of Libraries at Merton Council in London, set up CLSG, perhaps as a direct response to the campaign started by FCL.

CLSG sees the way forward for librarianship in Cuba as a partnership between professional associations such as ASCUBI and their counterparts abroad. As a result their stated aims take a more co-operative attitude towards the government in Cuba. They declare support for “Cuban libraries, library and information workers and the Cuban Library Association (ASCUBI); Cuba’s free and comprehensive education system and high literacy levels; and the Cuban people’s right to choose the social, political and economic systems which support their library service.” They aim to do this by working with groups such as Information for Social Change (a network of progressive librarians), the UK Library Association, Book Aid International (which sends books to Cuba) and the Cuba Solidarity Campaign based in the U.S. CLSG have stated they will produce articles for publication to highlight the achievements of the Cuban library service and, in a move similar to FCL’s advocacy of visits to the island to visit the independent librarians, CLSG will organise tours to Cuba to visit libraries and discuss professional issues with Cuban librarians.

CLSG takes a strong line on the Independent Libraries in Cuba Project. It sees Robert Kent primarily as a worker for the U.S. government who has been paid to make contact with dissidents in the form of the independent libraries. It criticises the impartiality of Cubanet, the main source of information on the independent libraries project and highlights the nature of the backers of Kent and Cubanet to make its point. Their opinion can be best summed up by the following quote: “The ‘independent libraries’ and
other 'non-governmental organisations' in Cuba are receiving funding from
the U.S. government as part of their 40 year effort to overthrow the Cuban
revolution.105

FCL has been quick to put forward replies to CLSG’s comments on Cuba’s
official libraries and to make strong points about the evils of censorship in
any society.106 Robert Kent denies that the FCL is funded by the CIA or any
US government agency, but states that FCL will take no position on
political issues such as the Torricell Act. He then goes on to describe track
2 of the act as “a section...which makes visits to Cuba easier for American
journalists, non-governmental organisations, and academics” and says that
the embargo “in reality authorises commerce between the two countries for
informational materials as books, newspapers, magazines, films and
sound recordings107, which is certainly a position at odds with opponents of
FCL and commentators such as Afrocubaweb.108

Kent however, has questioned the motives of CLSG in their support for the
Cuban government. He states that John Pateman has insisted a free press
exists in Cuba,109 and queries the perspective of a man who denies the
Khmer Rouge were responsible for atrocities in Cambodia.110 By offering to
work with the established library service in Cuba and thus ignoring the
independent libraries, CLSG finds itself at odds with FCL who see the
official library service as practitioners of censorship.

Support for CLSG in the U.S.

The majority of the debate on the independent libraries issue has been
carried out by American librarians, perhaps not surprising considering the
physical proximity of Cuba to the U.S. and the high profile of U.S.-Cuba
relations in U.S. politics. Support for CLSG has come from members of the
Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) section of the American
Library Association (ALA) such as Mark Rosenzweig, co-editor of the
journal Progressive Librarian. Rosenzweig has been present in the debate
from the beginning and has consistently criticised FCL for not taking a
stance on the US embargo and their reluctance to officially comment on
political issues.111 As a member of the Progressive Librarians Guild he has
promoted CLSG within the guild and pressed for it to be officially endorsed
by SRRT. He has also commented on FCL in e-journals such as Library
Juice.112

Alongside Rosenzweig’s support are the testimonies of U.S. librarians who
have visited Cuba recently and met with official and independent librarians.
While it is difficult for U.S. citizens to enter Cuba for non-professional
purposes it is possible to be granted visas for visits by academics and
professionals such as librarians.

Rhonda Neugebauer, a reference librarian from Wichita State University,
led a delegation of 17 librarians to Cuba in March 2000. The delegation
visited both public libraries and independent libraries and confirmed that
while the public library system was suffering from a lack of funds and
materials the librarians were dedicated to improving and developing their
services. Neugebauer commented directly on the embargo’s effects on the
Cuban library service and purchasing power of the librarians.113 In an
interview with Eliades Acosta, the director of the National Library, the issue
of censorship in the libraries was discussed. Acosta argued that censorship
did not exist in Cuban libraries and if books were not on the shelves it was
because there were no funds to purchase them. He accepted that he had a
mandate to “preserve the national patrimony” but emphasised the need for
the collection to “reflect the needs and desires of our people to be exposed
to all kinds of ideas and perspectives.”114

While these words are open to interpretation and have been attacked by
FCL,115 Neugebauer’s visits to the independent libraries contain some
interesting details and viewpoints. She tells of the two libraries she visited
being little more than bookshelves in family homes. Materials were deliv­
ered by members of the U.S. Interest Section in Havana or donated by
CANF in Miami and money was received from Miami and Mexico. The
families interviewed declared themselves to have a history of government
opposition and that the materials supplied by donors were useful in encour­
gaging opposition to the regime. Neugebauer concluded that the libraries
were not independent and that their directors were not librarians. She states
“the individuals involved in these activities cannot be considered indepen­
dent of interests outside of Cuba.”116

Accompanying Ms. Neugebauer on her trip was Larry Oberg, the university
librarian at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. His report, also printed
in Library Juice, confirmed Neugebauer’s observations regarding the state
of Cuba’s libraries and reiterated the commitment of the librarians to
develop collections that provide a variety of viewpoints, including those of
Cuban dissidents. He also commented that “at the same time, they do not
actively seek out and buy all of the vehemently anti-Fidel materials pub­
lished by dissident Cubans who reside in Miami, just as North American

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libraries do not actively seek out and buy all of the anti-gay and lesbian tracts published in Colorado Springs and other centres of right-wing Christian publishing.

Oberg drew the same conclusions from his visits to the independent libraries (the same two libraries as Rhonda Neugebauer), namely that the collections were small or non-existent. There were no signs, collections were not catalogued, circulation of materials was not recorded and the librarians were not librarians at all.

An intriguing footnote to Larry Oberg’s visit to Cuba was a copy of a letter he found from Robert Kent upon his return. The letter, addressed to the chair of the ALA Committee on Professional Ethics, Charles Harmon, and other members, suggested that Ms. Neugebauer and her colleagues present on the trip “may be subject to an enquiry by the ALA Committee on Professional Ethics” due to the misinformation they were likely to deliver on their return. Unsurprisingly Oberg took offence at this letter, which appeared to cast doubt on the findings of the delegation before it had even reported its conclusions.

Unfortunately, this type of machination is symptomatic of the way the debate has been conducted between the interested parties. While FCL has been particularly critical of John Pateman’s ideological background and views it has also tangled in library journals with Ann Sparanese, a librarian at the Englewood Public Library in New Jersey. Ms. Sparanese, to keep the argument balanced, gives as good as she gets.

Like Robert Kent, Sparanese has a long history of interest in Cuba and has visited many times, most relevantly to the 1994 IFLA conference and in November 2000 when she travelled to Havana to meet members of ASCUBI. She has been the most forceful opponent of FCL during the independent libraries debate, refuting claims made by Robert Kent in the IFLA Journal and Library Juice.

Sparanese questions the integrity of Cubanet and its supporters and suggests that the best way to create a fairer society in Cuba would be to end the embargo. Like Neugebauer and Oberg she sees the positives in the Cuban library service despite the lack of resources. She argues that the common thread between the directors of the independent libraries is their membership of opposition parties in Cuba, not that they are librarians. She is critical of Robert Kent’s reluctance to mention the embargo and the rights being denied to U.S. citizens as a result of this. Instead she accuses him of pursuing a simple “no-brainer” approach to the issue – the defence of intellectual freedom.

Sparanese’s major contribution to the debate was to foil FCL’s attempt to gain the support of the ALA at their midwinter conference in January 2001. In front of the ALA International Relations Latin America Sub-committee she argued, along with Rhonda Neugebauer, that the FCL were not independent, the independent librarians were not independent and that the FCL were running a campaign for recognition based on “rumour, hearsay, deception and partisan campaigning.” She called into question the reliability of the evidence presented by the FCL and Amnesty International when confronted with eyewitness reports from people like John Pateman, Rhonda Neugebauer and Larry Oberg. Most especially she damned the IFLA/FAIFE report as being based on evidence presented by FCL and telephone conversations with supposed independent librarians as opposed to face-to-face meetings. As a result of Sparanese’s paper the IRC LA Sub-committee, while acknowledging the complexity of the case, recommended that no action be taken, rejecting the FCL’s appeal for ALA endorsement.

Sparanese’s arguments have been backed up again recently by the eyewitness account of Dale Vidar, a librarian from South Oregon University Library, who visited the country in February 2001. In his article for New Breed Librarian Vidar reported on visits to public and independent libraries. Preservation of materials is the main issue he identified as a problem for the public library service, along with a noticeable lack of new books on the shelves. Despite the lack of cash resources to tackle these problems he highlighted the courtesy and professionalism of the librarians and other staff. He also recounted talking to a librarian in the Santa Clara province about censorship and was told she was free to purchase any material, albeit on a limited budget.

Vidar visited the Biblioteca Independiente Dulce María Loynaz in Havana and the provincial Biblioteca Independiente Reyes Magos in Pinar del Rio. What he found confirmed and confounded his suspicions. Expecting to find small private collections of books in peoples’ homes he was not disappointed, but he was surprised at the commitment shown to the cause by the director of the library in Havana. Despite neither of the directors having any library training he mentions that some effort had been made to record the circulation of books but goes on to say “this was not a library by any standard.”
Vidar’s chief concern was that the committed independent librarians he met were operating somewhere between the Cuban government and the opposition groups, with the directors of the independent libraries not realising the agenda of their supposed supporters abroad. He believes these same supporters are using the word “libraries” to arouse sentiment and bring attention to a cause hijacked for political means, while the directors are people trying to serve their community in any way they can.

The Situation

Two opposing sides line up against each other in the independent libraries debate. The supporters of the cause, most notably FCL and Cubanet, believe the independent libraries to be providing a service to their users that is unavailable from public libraries where books are on closed access and the government imposes censorship on collections. Other supporters, such as the Swedish Liberal Party, see the independent librarians as champions of democracy in a country that badly needs it. Both sets of supporters highlight the abuses suffered by the independent librarians at the hands of the government as proof that the independent libraries are providing access to information in a country where the government is stifling intellectual freedom. To support the independent libraries in this climate of repression is to champion intellectual freedom as outlined in the Declaration of Human Rights and as a result everyone, librarian or not, committed to this cause must respond by standing up for the independent libraries of Cuba.

Those who oppose this point of view, such as CLSG, members of ALA and the Cuban government itself, point to the success of the Cuban literacy programme over the last 41 years as an example of the government’s commitment to education and intellectual freedom. They highlight the hardship caused by the U.S. embargo and the removal of Soviet funding as a reason for the decline in Cuban publishing and say that a lack of funds is the real reason there are few books on the shelves published after 1991. To this group, the independent librarians are not librarians at all and in fact are dissidents, government opponents who are benefitting from US funds channelled into Cuba via such mechanisms as the Torricelli and the Helms-Burton acts. They argue that the connections of FCL and Cubanet to groups such as Freedom House, USAID and the Center for a Free Cuba make their claims of non-partisanship invalid and their positions shaky. Some go as far as to call FCL a front for the CIA. To the detractors of the independent libraries project the future of Cuba will be made more secure by working within the existing library infrastructure and through co-operation with existing professional bodies.

I was aware that the debate regarding the independent libraries had become quite heated over the two years it had been raging. With both sides holding such polarised opinions it seemed to me there would be no way of exploring the debate properly unless I was able to visit some of the independent libraries firsthand and examine who was involved in the project and what exactly they were doing. With this in mind, I visited three independent libraries when I visited the 31st ACURIL conference in Havana in May 2001. Joining me on these visits were members of ALA and IFLA/FAIFE, who were also keen to visit the independent libraries in person.

Fieldwork

According to Ramon Colas and Gisela Delgado there were 82 independent libraries in Cuba at the time of our visit, spread out all over the country. To draw conclusions from visiting three libraries is not ideal, but for the purposes of this report it must be done. I would suggest that visits to some of the provincial libraries may have yielded more information, perhaps with regards to intimidation and confiscations of collections, but circumstances dictated I had to stay in Havana.

The interviews with the directors of the independent libraries concentrated on ascertaining whether these collections and their keepers were more than personal projects — whether or not, in fact, they constituted a library at all. At the same time the delegations also sought to confirm the alleged abuses perpetrated against the independent librarians. Finally, the question of foreign support was addressed and the possibility of outside influence on the independent libraries explored.

The Collections

The collections in the three libraries visited were as I expected after my prior research into this topic. Estrella Garcia’s collection was the smallest, and although she told us she had about 2000 volumes in her flat I could only see a few hundred. The collections in the other two libraries I visited were larger, and ran to about 2000 or so books. In general, the books were in fairly poor condition, although in all three collections there were new books that stood out from the rest. Invariably these were recent donations.
While the libraries of Gisela Delgado and Ricardo Gonzales displayed a fair degree of classification and organisation, and gave the impression that effort had been expended in their construction, the library of Estrella Garcia was not organised to any extent and consisted of double shelved books crammed into two cabinets. Delgado and Gonzalez had both attempted to keep some sort of record of their collection, new additions for example, and even a list of wanted titles in Delgado’s case, but Garcia was not able to produce any sort of records for her collection. It seemed that Delgado and Gonzalez, both, by their own admission, high up in the organisational structure of the independent library project, were striving to replicate a library as much as they could while Garcia, and one assumes many others like her, were simply providing access to books currently in their homes.

The types of material available in the collections were wide ranging, with novels and poetry featuring heavily along with the collected works of Jose Marti, Cuba’s national hero. Alongside these all libraries offered religious books. It was difficult to single out overtly political titles in any of the collections, but in two of the libraries there were copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a work frowned on by the authorities. Garcia did not mention if she had any titles unavailable in the public libraries but Delgado showed us works by Lonyaz that supposedly disappeared from library shelves when she began criticising the government. Both Delgado and Gonzales were keen to impress upon us that visitors to their libraries should be able to choose what they wanted to read without fear of censorship.

All three libraries had room to accommodate readers but none were signposted outside to attract visitors. All of the directors reported a regular and committed number of users, and Delgado kept circulation records detailing who had what on loan. Gonzalez lent to all types of people, including local shops, although he said his user numbers had dropped off in the last year as a result of interest from the authorities.

The Directors

None of the directors of the independent libraries was a librarian. None had received professional training although Gonzales had consulted books on librarianship. Garcia described herself as an agent for news and revealed that the majority of the people who visit her apartment come to use the telephone to receive news from abroad. Delgado used to be a computer technician, Colas a psychologist and Gonzales an independent journalist. All of these people expressed the view that they were against the current government in Cuba, with Garcia describing herself as a dissident and Delgado and Colas admitting to being part of a dissident movement.

Harassment

All the members of the project interviewed reported harassment of some degree from the authorities over the last two years. Delgado reported that she had been led away from her house in handcuffs and detained. Gonzales reported the same. All three libraries we visited had their phones tapped and neighbours were often too scared to visit for fear of being associated with the activities taking place next door.

However, while it is clear there is interference from the authorities in the lives of all the people we spoke too, the reasons for this harassment are unclear. Only Gonzales mentioned confiscations of books and he said anything sent to him nearly always got through. When asked if she was detained for her collection of books and her library activities Garcia answered that she was taken in for her counter-revolutionary activities, not her library. Delgado and Colas reported that they had lost their jobs and had been government blacklisted since 1994, four years before the start of the independent libraries project. They had been in trouble with the authorities before supporters such as FCL took up their cause. Gonzales was arrested when he tried, along with other dissidents, to hold a workshop in his house but when questioned about this he said he thought the repressive acts were temporary and that there had been none in the last year. The reason for this could be, as Delgado and Colas pointed out, that closing the independent libraries might be more trouble than it is worth to a government concerned about its image in the international community.

Foreign Support

All the people questioned were aware of foreign support for the project. Delgado and Colas received aid from exiled Cubans in the form of books and were aware of Robert Kent and FCL. Gonzales has many contacts abroad due to his journalism and received financial support from individuals in the U.S., although he said this was not from the government. He said
he had not heard of Robert Kent but he had heard of FCL. When pressed on this issue he said he may have been in contact with Kent under a different name. I felt he had more to tell.

Most interesting was the support Garcia was receiving from the U.S. Interest Office in Havana. There was a large box of recently arrived political titles in the apartment when we visited, delivered by a U.S. government employee. This was physical proof of the activities encouraged under the Torricelli and Helms-Burton acts in practice.

Official Reports

Members of ALA and IFLA/FAIFE who visited these libraries have since produced reports detailing their findings. Ross Shimmon, Secretary General of IFLA, produced a short report specifically dealing with the independent libraries that he visited during the week of ACURIL. In it he concludes that the existence of the independent libraries suggests that some Cubans feel they are not able to get the information they want from the national library system. He says that, while the material available in the independent libraries does not represent a threat to the regime, the libraries are clearly receiving support from abroad. In order to ensure the future growth of a Cuban library system unable to meet some of its users’ information needs he urges closer co-operation with ASCUBI and the Cuban authorities by IFLA and the ALA, and he condemns the embargo which is partly responsible for creating the current situation.

The embargo is also condemned as a cause of much difficulty for Cuba’s librarians in the ALA report produced by John W. Berry and his colleagues. The ALA report highlights the dedication of Cuba’s librarians despite a lack of equipment and materials and urges closer co-operation between the ALA, ASCUBI and SOCICT in the future. The efforts of the independent libraries to establish alternative collections to those provided by the government is noted, but the report recognises that the political dimensions of the project cannot be ignored.

The largest report, from IFLA’s FAIFE committee, goes into more detail about the independent libraries project. It acknowledges that the access to information issues in Cuba are neither black nor white and that the embargo has led to tough selection choices for the public sector librarians. The lack of funds is highlighted as the cause of a lack of materials on libraries’ shelves, not a policy of censorship on the part of the government. The report lists several supposedly banned titles that were found in the national library. With regard to the independent libraries FAIFE urges co-operation between the government and the project rather than condemnation, but acknowledges that the Cuban library service sees the project as a political campaign designed to discredit them.

Conclusion

As far as providing a library that would be recognised as such by a professional the three premises that I visited fell short. This tallies with reports produced by Neugebauer, Pateman and Vidar. These were covert operations with collections of varying quality and organisation that were maintained without benefit of professional standards. It is clear that they exist and are used because their patrons are not getting the information they require from the public library service, although whether this is because the public library service is not providing this information due to the effects of the embargo, a lack of funds or a policy of censorship is open to question. Nonetheless, the public library system is failing at least some of its citizens by not providing for its users and the independent libraries project is the result.

The independent libraries were set up to remedy this situation through the promotion of culture without adding politics. However, despite the claims of the movement to be non-political it is clear its members hold views opposing the Cuban government. CLSG maintains that Berta Mexidor is a director of an independent press agency in Las Tunas and an “activist for democracy” while her husband, Ramon Colas is a “founding member of the Los Pinos Nuevos Party and secretary of the Science, Health and Education of the Democratic Solidarity Party.” The report that this information comes from also lists the political connections of 12 other people involved in the independent libraries project. Estrella Garcia openly admits to being a dissident and providing a phone and premises for other dissidents to meet while Ricardo Gonzales also declared his disagreement with the current regime.

To describe the directors of the independent libraries as librarians therefore is misleading, and enables champions of the project abroad to raise sympathy for dissidents by labelling them as librarians — dedicated professionals who are doing their job to bring information to the disenfranchised people of Cuba. This is not to say it is wrong to call for support for dissidents in an oppressive regime — fundamental human rights such as freedom of access.
to information cannot be valued highly enough and should be fought for. However, the rhetoric and support being generated by groups such as FCL abroad quite deliberately plays on the angle that these people are librarians, and therefore are our colleagues and as such we should stand up for them and be counted. This obscures the issue and enables FCL to raise the profile of the issue by painting a picture of librarians suffering abuses at the hands of a government bent on denying its citizens access to information. This is an image that will appeal to pro-democracy activists the world over. The reality is that a varied group of dissidents who possess book collections, not a great number of librarians, has suffered abuses at the hands of government supporters. While this is something for all committed to democracy to be concerned about, this is not a new occurrence in Cuba.134 The harsh penalties meted out to opponents of Castro’s regime are well documented and are rightly condemned. As a method of drawing attention to the oppression of dissidents the situation of the Independent Libraries in Cuba Project is perfect for FCL to exploit, but as it does so it neglects to mention to tell the whole truth about the situation — namely that no librarians are involved.

It is also clear that foreign support plays a part in the project, whether it is relatively innocuous such as books sent from relatives in Miami, or something that rubbish claims to be independent such as deliveries of books from the U.S. government. To donate books to those who need them is no crime, but when faced with U.S. policy on Cuba, especially the Torricelli and Helms-Burton acts, along with proposed support to dissidents from CANF, it is hard not to draw the conclusion that the independent libraries, while they may not be aware of it on the ground in Cuba, are playing a part in a greater scheme outside of their control. Robert Kent has admitted taking books and cash to the island with the help of Freedom House and the Center for a Free Cuba. The existence of links to the U.S. government in the form of its Interest Office in Havana gives further weight to the claims of CLSG and Ann Sparanese about the level of external support being provided to the independent libraries and the real motivations of FCL. The network of connections between FCL, Cubanet, Freedom House’s Democracy in Cuba Project and U.S. government organisations such as USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy invites criticism of claims of non-partisanship on the parts of those involved. All of these links make it hard not to see the presence of books from the U.S. in the independent libraries as the final piece of a U.S. government policy designed to bring about the collapse of the Castro regime by funding dissident groups.

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2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.


7 Calabrese, A., 'Library visits to Cuban public libraries, a provincial library, a special library

Progressive Librarian #19/20


6 Seidelin, S. *Libraries in Cuba*, p. 8

7 I visited the library next to the Capitolio building where I paid $2 for 20 minutes use. The wage for a Cuban librarian is $181 per year. Source: Neugebauer, R., *Cuba: Sovereignty, development and intellectual freedom* (American Library Association, 2001), p.2.


16 Ibid. These resolutions were passed 1991-97, in 1999 and also in 2000.


21 Ibid. This list can be subscribed to at: http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/elists.html


23 Ibid, p. 12.


29 This list can be subscribed to at: http://www.ala.org/alaoir/oif/elists.html


34 Ibid.


36 This is from a conversation with independent librarians Gisela Delgado and Ramon Colas - see section 2.5, p.42.


41 Ibid, p. 20.


Thinkquest.org. (1998). The Helms-Burton Act [Online]. Available: http://library.thinkquest.org/19355/the_helms-burton_act.html [2001, July 25] The ideal of taking back property is shown in the section of the Helms-Burton act that allows US companies to sue foreign companies that work with the Cuban government. The US government justifies this section of the act, not signed into law and deferred every six months since 1996, by saying that the foreign companies are using stolen US property. It has been suggested that this part of the bill was intended to benefit only the wealthiest Cuban-Americans - lawyers for the Bacardi corporation were involved in writing much of the law and in order to be able to sue an exile had to have lost $50,000 or more in the Revolution, a large amount of money in 1959.


74 For example: Kent, Robert (Rken20551@cs.com). (2001, April 22) The Friends of Cuban Libraries April press release - European aid proposed for Cuban libraries. Email to Stuart Hamilton (stuham@hotmail.com) and Kent, Robert (Rken20551@cs.com). (2001, March 22) Background to the situation of Cuba's independent librarians. E-mail to Stuart Hamilton (stuham@hotmail.com)


90 Malm, Fredrik (malm@liberal.se). (2001, July 20) More and more Cubans defy state power. (From Falun Kuuren, 2001, June 28) E-mail to Stuart Hamilton (stuham@hotmail.com)


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96 Ibid.


104 Ibid.


109 Kent, Robert (Rken20551@cs.com). (2001, January 21). The Friends of Cuban Libraries Internal Newsletter - A setback at the ALA... and a new initiative. E-mail to Stuart Hamilton (stuham@hotmail.com)

110 In a letter to the online version of The New Internationalist, John Pateman states that the Khmer Rouge were not responsible for the worst atrocities of the Cambodian conflict in the north-east of the country as they had little influence in that region. He states that Pol Pot did not give centralised orders to carry massacres in the country but, while these might be highly controversial statements, to suggest that Pateman denies point blank the role of the Khmer Rouge in the atrocities based on this short letter is simplifying the comments somewhat. Pateman, J. (1993): Bureaucratic Pot. *New Internationalist* [Online], 244. Available: www.oneworld.org/ni/issue244/letters.htm [2001, July 21]


114 Ibid.

115 Kent, Robert. (Rken20551@cs.com). (2001, January 21). The Friends of Cuban Libraries Internal Newsletter - A setback at the ALA... and a new initiative. E-mail to Stuart Hamilton (stuham@hotmail.com)


118 One of the independent libraries visited by Neugebauer and Oberg contained no books at all as the family that lived in the apartment had given all the materials away in preparation for exit to the US. (Ibid) They had obtained visas for this and it has been suggested that this is one of the reasons Cubans involved themselves in dissident activities – to be allowed to leave the country. Incidentally, a independent library that I visited from FCL's list (see 2.5 Fieldwork) was no longer in operation and it must be considered that not all the addresses given in documents such as this or on the Cubanet website are (http://www.cubanet.org/bibliotecas/proyecto.htm) actually operating as independent libraries.


125 Ibid.
Indeed! It may be on the web today, but is there a plan in place to ensure that it will be there in twenty or more years? Probably not. In the haste to make information available electronically there are few agreed-upon plans for the preservation of digital information and much has already been lost. The particular concern of preserving electronic state government documents recently became an issue for our State Documents Interest Group of the Documents Association of New Jersey (DANJ) when we recognized that not only are fewer documents produced in print format but there is not a state plan to preserve the electronic documents being produced. For several years the Division of Elections in New Jersey eliminated the web page that gave the previous year’s election lists and results. Fortunately, the concern from those using the information prompted the Division of Elections to begin to retain this information. But the earlier information is gone. Recently, Public Utilities created a new web page and eliminated virtually all of the documents that had existed on the earlier page. At least one agency replaces its old annual report with the new one. The predicament in New Jersey is not an isolated one. Our response was to research the issue of digital preservation and to present a report of recommendations to the State Librarian. The report, edited by Sue Lyons (2001, available at the DANJ website, http://www.danj.org/DANJ), provides a thoughtful overview of the concerns and problems of digital archiving, offering recommendations for a cooperative process and plan by the state. In the report, Lyons cites several examples of lost digital information, including data from the Viking mission to Mars and all computerized data from a New York study mapping land use and environmental data throughout the state.

At the federal government level the situation is the same. There is no overall plan for archiving federal government documents that exist only in digital format. Instead each agency determines its own preservation policy.
Recently, at an annual government documents conference, this author listened to a representative from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) promise the audience of government documents librarians that all digital information at the BLS would be preserved forever. But will Congress adequately fund BLS to be able to follow through on this guarantee? That remains to be seen. The Government Printing Office (GPO) has had significant budget cuts at the same time that Congress has given GPO the mandate to cut printing costs by making information available digitally. This, of course, does offer wider access to the information today, but what about tomorrow? Clearly, the rush to make information available quickly and widely, often for “future planning” purposes, has overshadowed the need to ensure that the very same information will continue to be available for planners and historians of the future. The cart is again before the horse. While reading David McCullough’s recent book on John Adams, it was evident to me that the book relies heavily on Adams’ personal writings — much of which is still available in its original form. One wonders about the resources that will be available to historians of the future.

The Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) regulates those libraries committed to being official depositories of federal government documents. One of the responsibilities of each member library is to ensure access to government information. Because of the concern of potential technological obsolescence, there is a substantial amount of printing taking place of electronic documents as lengthy as 500 pages (both state and federal) both by libraries and by end-users. There is great concern among FDLP members about our ability to permanently ensure access to electronic government documents. Cowell, Jacobs and Peterson (2001, October) have brought to light some of those concerns. Their answers to frequently asked questions follow.

a. Since my patrons can access government documents on the Internet, why do I need a copy of those documents?

Ensuring access implies being able to control the existence, integrity, and location of an item. If someone other than you can move, replace, alter, or remove the copy you want to provide for your users, then you can not ensure access. The presence today of a document on the web is no guarantee of its presence tomorrow.

b. But doesn’t GPO guarantee “permanent public access”?

This is GPO’s goal, but there is a serious potential problem with it: GPO is not funded to do this. The ability of GPO to provide access to everything is only as assured as the next funding cycle and the whim of Congress. If Congress can, as it has, effectively remove vital materials from the depository system and allow GPO to change a depository system to system without deposits, how certain can we be that Congress will not change GPO’s mandate, or abolish GPO, or privatize all or part of the “permanent public access” collection, or fund GPO at levels that make it impossible for GPO to keep everything online always? Given these circumstances, libraries need their own copies of digital documents in order to speak with any confidence of permanent public access.

c. Can’t we rely on the government (gov’t agencies, NARA, etc.) to preserve for the long term? My library isn’t an archive after all!

It is unlikely that agencies will preserve their materials in either the library sense or the archival sense. Agencies have balked when told to do so by NARA [National Archives and Records Administration] and have rarely shown an understanding of the need for older materials.

d. What do I do if my library director won’t let me have a digital collection or won’t fund anything new?

Emphasize the importance of the role of libraries in society. If libraries do not take responsibility for selecting, organizing and preserving digital information one of two things will certainly happen. Either information will be lost because no one will take on this role, or the private sector will do it for those items that are profitable.

Richard Wiggins (2001, Spring) illustrates the challenge of archiving digital information by revealing that with the inauguration of George Bush, Jr., the White House website (http://www.whitehouse.gov) was completely changed and all of the Clinton administration’s web collection disappeared overnight. Fortunately, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) had begun to preserve the content of the Clinton administration’s contributions to the White House web site although some suspect that information has been lost anyway as it has been reported that agencies in the Executive Branch were not all successful in complying with NARA preservation requests. Wiggins also mentions the accompanying problem of 170,000 links to the site, many “deep links”, that were suddenly broken, as reported by AltaVista, not to mention the possible millions of personal bookmarks that were instantly dead.
The preservation of electronic journals is also a concern for libraries. Wiggins (2001, Spring, inset article) notes the irony of the demise of CICNet Journal Archive (Committee on Institutional Cooperation) due to lack of funding. For six years, from 1991-1997, the group attempted to archive electronic journals. The archive has "vanished." "Ironic, indeed, to lose not a mere collection but an archive whose purpose was to prevent loss of electronic content. How many pioneering e-journals, many of them hosted on now defunct Gopher servers, were lost for eternity?" In a related issue, a message posted on October 5, 2001, to the Collection Development Listserv (colldv-l@usc.edu) notes an attempt to obtain an article beginning on page 415 of vol. 28, no. 4 of Catalyst Today. The online version, available via Science Direct, only shows articles in that volume up to page 389. The response to a query to Science Direct was that at least 2% of its electronic journal content is missing.

The problem stated by O'Mahony (1998, p. 114) continues. His specific concern was about electronic government information, but certainly relates to other forms of digital information.

Each day that the problems of electronic preservation and permanent public access go unresolved, alarming amounts of government information continue to be lost as databases come and go from agency websites, files are deleted from government computer servers, digital storage media deteriorate, and hardware and software become obsolete. The continuous and cumulative effects of this ongoing catastrophe are to deny taxpayers access to information they already paid for, to impair the public's ability to use government information already collected and compiled, to waste public and private resources in having to duplicate efforts to retrieve information previously available but now lost, and to allow the historical record of the nation to literally vanish before our eyes. Moreover, it severely undermines the potential promise and usefulness of new electronic technologies when the long-term consequence of their use is an ever-widening breach in our collected knowledge and information bank.

An Overview of the Problems

Although there are groups working at the state, national and global levels to determine the best practices for digital archiving, the problems are complex and the stakeholders are many. Understanding the issue of digital archiving is important for librarians at all levels as local collection development and preservation decisions are being made. There are no standards and no agreed-upon solutions. One must know who the stakeholders are, the technological problems involved in archiving and retrieving digital information, the current recommendations for archiving digital information, the costs involved, and some of the groups working for a solution. Although the concern of this author is primarily the preservation of government information, references to non-governmental collaborations will also be given.

The problems are not all technological, though the technological problems are many. Feeney (1999, p. 108) thoroughly describes the stakeholders as authors, publishers, libraries, archive centers, distributors, networked information service providers, IT suppliers, legal depositaries, consortia, universities and research funders. Feeney also suggests considering the relationship of the stakeholder to the digital material: "initiators, who are involved in collection development; regulators, such as those bodies involved in the legal deposit system or copyright legislation; creators of digital records; rights owners; fund holders, who manage the funds available for preservation activity; providers of electronic publications and new or repackaged editions; readers, who require access to digital material; and archivists, who are concerned with conserving digital material and maintaining its integrity." Each stakeholder is involved at a different stage of the "life-cycle" of the digital resource and may not be considering the effect on a stakeholder at another stage, thus requiring a more coordinated effort on the part of the stakeholders. Feeney (p. 112-113) has summarized the main stages in the life-cycle concept developed by the Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS) as: 1. Data creation; 2. Data management and preservation (including acquisition, retention or disposal; data structure; data description and documentation; data storage; data preservation); 3. Data use; and 4. Rights management.

At the national level, the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) has recognized problems regarding the preservation of government information that have been compounded by recent technological developments. Included in the problems is the lack of an overall organized plan for preserving digital government resources. A narrative description of the legislative proposal by NCLIS, The Public Information Resources Reform Act of 2001, appears in Appendix 11 of volume 2 of A Comprehensive Assessment of Public Information Dissemination (http://www.nclis.gov/govt/assess/assess.vol2.pdf). The proposed
legislation advocates reforming the federal government’s public information structure to bring together “in a systematic fashion all of the key elements necessary for a comprehensive public information resources management program and to elevate the importance of federal government public information resources to the status of a strategic national asset (NCLIS, 2001, p. 2-2).” NCLIS recommends harmonizing the information resources management policies, programs and practices at each stage of the information life cycle due to the inseparable inter-relationship of government agencies. This harmonization or collaboration directly relates to the technological issues to be discussed ahead because of the need for government agencies to provide uniform effectiveness across agencies within all of the digital resource life-cycle stages. Included in this detailed report are recommendations for surveying preferred user formats for data (including bibliographic, graphical, numerical, sound, spatial, textual, video and multimedia data types); for surveying patterns of user preference for format types (including database, spreadsheet, tagged markup, image, audio, video, text and word processing formats); and for tracking online approaches to information (user interfaces supported, web design approaches, bulletin board systems). NCLIS suggests that both the opportunities and the challenges of technological developments need to be approached from an inter-branch, intergovernmental, and interagency direction in order to ensure future interconnectivity.

Standards

There is quite a standards debate since “no computer technical standards have yet shown any likelihood of lasting forever” (Bearman, 1999). However, those recommending an adherence to standards use the rationale that standards “can assist by facilitating the transfer of information between hardware and software platforms as technologies evolve” and “resources which are encoded using open standards have a greater chance of remaining accessible after an extended period than resources encoded with proprietary standards” (PADI, Standards, 2001). A thorough discussion of standards, including a lengthy bibliography, can be found at PADI: Preserving Access to Digital Information, Standards, http://www.nla.gov.au/padi/topics/43.html.

Descriptive metadata has no agreed-upon standard. The Colorado Digitization Project (http://coloradodigital.coalliance.org/glossary.html#M) defines metadata as: “data about data or information known about the image in order to provide access to the image. Usually includes information about the intellectual content of the image, digital representation data, and security or rights management information.” The OCLC/RLG Working Group on Preservation Metadata (http://www.oclc.org/digitalpreservation/pres­meta_up.pdf) reviews the concerns that accompany transferring more traditional bibliographic cataloging practices into the electronic world. Typical metadata standards are US MARC and the emerging scheme, Dublin Core. Research is being conducted to attempt to develop a uniform standard (see OCLC/RLG Working Group on Preservation Metadata), which Bearman (1999) states must exist for any of the electronic preservation models to succeed. “Serious proposals for metadata encapsulation strategies need to address how the required metadata will be identified, created or captured at the time of the creation of the records; by what means it will be stored in inviolable conjunction with the record contents; how it will support the use of the record by authorized users over time; and by whom, where, and at what costs the infrastructure for record keeping will be constructed and maintained.” (Bearman, p. 4)

Costs

Feeney (1999, p. 116-120) gives a thorough breakdown of cost considerations based on one of the studies commissioned by the Digital Archiving Working Group (DAWG) and a summary will be given here. “One clear message that has emerged is that a great deal of money can be wasted if digitization projects are undertaken without due regard to long-term preservation. It is now relatively easy to produce digital versions of texts or images. However, if there is no plan in place for archiving the digital files, long-term preservation will be expensive, or may even result in the work having to be repeated.” (Feeney, p. 120) As it is difficult to isolate preservation costs within the life-cycle of a digital resource, costs associated with all elements in the life-cycle of the digital resource are considered. The following cost model summary defines seven key areas: data creation; data selection and evaluation; data management, including data documentation, validation, structure and storage; resource disclosure; data use; data preservation; and rights management.

Cost model summary: Data creation costs: A key to this stage is providing adequate documentation of the digital resource. Data selection and evaluation: Acquisition decisions include how easily a digital resource can be managed, catalogued, accessed and preserved. Data management including data documentation, validation, structure and storage: Documentation, the description of the “structure, contents, provenance and history” (Feeney,
must be checked, edited, added to if necessary, made available to users and kept up-to-date. Validation involves the periodic assessment of the resource and the copying and refreshing necessary for preservation. The structure refers to the original format of the resource and will determine the costs involved for providing future storage and access. Available resources determine storage, by data volume and by the choice of preservation and use. (Feeney, p. 118-120, also describes in detail the high costs of rescuing data, or “digital archaeology.”) Resource disclosure: These costs, though not necessarily involved with preservation, involve “discovering, extracting and preparing the object for use.” (p. 117) Data use: The structure of the digital resource will determine the costs of delivering the resource to end users and could involve online or CD-ROM access. Data preservation: The main costs include “agreeing on the preferred standard formats; testing the conversion for a specific category of resource; running the conversion as a batch process; testing a sample of converted resources; deleting the old versions if required; copying the resulting files.” (p. 118) Rights management: Consideration must be given to intellectual property rights and the legal issues of data protection and confidentiality, which determine issues of access, use, and legal preservation. These potentially substantial costs can actually be the highest cost of digital archiving.

One cost model is the Yale University Libraries Project Open Book, designed to study the costs of converting the printed text and accompanying materials in 10,000 brittle books to digital image (Butler, 1997, p. 73-74). One of the “realities” that became clear following this analysis of digital storage costs is that “the digital world not only makes collaboration possible, it may make it economically imperative...[forcing us] to think about the economics of digital libraries not as single institutions, each trying to build the digital mega collection, but as a system of digital libraries and archives that works collaboratively to acquire, describe, disseminate, preserve and store information resources which may be individually or jointly owned.” (p. 74)

Project Open Book investigators expected to find that both digital storage and access costs would be cheaper than the costs of storage and access in a traditional paper-based library. However, the results of the study showed that unit costs for storage were more than 12 times higher, and for access 50% higher in the digital archive than in the traditional library. These results were true in the first year of operation and continued to be true for storage costs, though to a lesser degree projected over ten years, even when staff and overhead costs for the traditional library were taken into consideration. Clearly this economic analysis favors the traditional library. On the other hand, if we think about the digital library as a fundamentally different kind of organization which needs to be structured, organized, and managed in a different way, a different picture begins to appear.

When Yale modeled the costs for a distributed network-based system of archives rather than for a single institutional model, the cost comparisons begin to improve significantly. Access costs per volume evened out in the 4th year and favored the digital archive by 57% in year 10. Even then, however, the digital archive began to be less expensive than the traditional library for storage costs only in the 7th year.

Additional cost discussions that include actual monetary figures are found in Wiggins (2001, Spring) and Lee (2001, May).

Rushing Ahead Before We're Ready

Karen Hunter, Senior Vice President, Elsevier Science, Inc., and an original member of the Task Force on Archiving of Digital Information convened by the Research Libraries Group and the Commission on Preservation and Access in 1994 (see Appendix, p. ), states that “there is no magic bullet in electronic archiving. Those of us who are spending large chunks of our professional time on the topic know that it will require a lot of trust and good-faith effort to continue to move things forward. It is too important and too expensive to be left to chance” (Hunter, 2000, final paragraph). David Bearman of Archives & Museum Informatics (1999, p. 1) is troubled by the suggestion that a magic bullet solution (“a simple, universally applicable, one-time fix”) has even been proposed.

Digital Preservation Strategies

The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

Deserving of special attention in the discussion of standards and digital preservation strategies is the particular challenge faced by the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) because of its responsibility to “preserve and deliver authentic records to subsequent generations of users.” (Thibodeau, 2001)
What differentiates records from documentary materials in general is not their form, but their connection to the activities in which they are made and received. If this link is broken, corrupted, or even obscured, the information in the record may be preserved, but the record itself is lost. This fundamental difference between records and documents can be readily illustrated empirically. For example, a map of Sarajevo is a document, but a map of Sarajevo known to have been used in making a targeting decision that led to the bombing of the Chinese Embassy is an essential record of that action. The key difference between the document and the record is the specification of the context of action in which the record was involved. To preserve authentic records entails preserving the documents themselves and also their connections to the activities in which they were used....To preserve records means to preserve them in their original order. To extend the National Archives of the United States into the digital era, then, entails being able to preserve the content, structure and context of the records. When any of these elements can only be expressed in digital form, the records must be preserved in that form. For NARA, as for other archival institutions, the difficulty of doing so is compounded by the commitment to preserve records permanently....The wholesale absence of proven methods for digital preservation presses acutely on NARA. But NARA is not only responsible for preserving unique historical materials, but also for guiding all other federal agencies in creating and managing all of the records they need in performing their functions. The requirements for managing active records in support of the specific needs of ongoing activities are significantly different from those entailed by the objective of preserving and delivering authentic records to future users whose interests, objectives, methods and tools are essentially unknowable. (Thibodeau, 2001, p. 1-2)

A discussion of the cooperative research into Persistent Object Preservation, being considered by NARA to address its unique situation, appears in the Appendix.

Migration

Hunter (2000) notes that in international discussions regarding archiving issues there is a presumption that for online journals, migration will be the methodology of choice. However, a great number of questions still need to be answered and she suggests that “until those questions are resolved, libraries will be understandably reluctant to make a permanent switch from paper to electronic collections. What should be archived? In what format? How many copies of the archive are needed? Who holds those copies? What is the access to the archive and who controls that access? How does licensing affect archive building? What can the scholarly community afford?” (Hunter, par. 3)

Keeping those questions in mind, migration is defined as the “periodic transfer of digital materials from one hardware/software configuration to another, or from one generation of computer technology to a subsequent generation” (PADI, 2001, Migration). For example, the information on a floppy disk may be transferred to a CD-ROM format, offering only a temporary preservation since the CD-ROM format must then be migrated when the technology changes again. The digital information must be refreshed without changing it and in a new operating environment the copy is not exactly the same as the original, requiring decisions about the aspects that need to be preserved. Metadata can assist here in providing information about migrations and the effect on the digital object. In some cases, software that is “backwards compatible” can simplify the migration process (the most recent version of the software having the capability of decoding the files created in the earlier version). And systems that are interoperable will also help. However, there is no guarantee as to the compatibility over time as technological developments become increasingly complex and/or it is no longer financially worthwhile for a software manufacturer to support such compatibilities. Some question the practicality of migration while some point out that each new format will require a unique solution.

Migration discussions include the most basic strategy of changing media and transferring from the digital mode to a more stable, controlled environment, the most extreme version being the preservation on paper or preservation quality microfilm. Although an archival quality paper or microfilm record can last up to 500 years (Lyons, 2001), the advantage of preserving a digital record is that the print or microfilm record may not be able to adequately represent the original object as the digital functionality of the resource can be destroyed. Feeney (1999, p. 114) mentions the computation capabilities, graphic display or indexing that can be lost, citing the equations embedded in a spreadsheet, and the impossibility of printing out an interactive full motion video or preserving a multimedia document as a
"flat file." Concerns over data loss and the loss of functionality or the "look and feel" of the original platform are still of a concern regarding the migration method.

**Emulation**

Those concerned about the drawbacks to migration view emulation as the alternative, superior method. "The essential idea behind emulation is to be able to access or run original data/software on a new/current platform by running software on a new/current platform that emulates the original platform." (Granger, 2000, para. 2) Granger and Bearman (1999) provide thorough reviews of the emulation option, which is championed by Jeff Rothenberg (1998).

**Encapsulation**

This technique has been proposed as a strategy to be used in conjunction with other methods in order to interpret content using new systems over time. “Encapsulation can be achieved by using physical or logical structures called ‘containers’ or ‘wrappers’ to provide a relationship between all information components, such as the digital object and other supporting information such as a persistent identifier, metadata, software specifications for emulation.” (PADI, 2001, Encapsulation)

**Conclusion**

Those of us on the DANJ State Documents Interest Group became concerned enough to educate ourselves more thoroughly about digital preservation issues and to produce a report of concern for the State Librarian. From around this country, others have responded to the usefulness of this report to assist them in their own digital preservation discussions. We continue to discuss the problem. This is an essential first step for any organization. In an effort to recognize all of the stakeholders and to successfully address all of the stages of the life-cycle of a digital resource, all members of the organization need to embark on the discussion. The Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) and Research Libraries Group (RLG) have developed the Digital Preservation Commons (DPC), intended to promote discussion about digital preservation and archiving issues. The goal of DPC is to identify best practices for preserving digital objects. The URL for DPC is http://www.oclc.org/digitalpreservation.

Become aware of regional, state, national and global partnerships that can be a model for working collaboratively on the issue of digital archiving. Soate (1997, p. 15) suggests stepping back, considering the organizational mission and "how it might best be served through digital preservation programs; to recall and understand what is known already in the organization about digital preservation — the experiences everyone has had, for example, with migrating digital data from one system to another; to consider analogous experiences with preserving the print heritage — what are the lessons to be learned?" Solutions to the problems of digital archiving are years away. Beware of the promises of electronic publishers and, yes, keep the print version; that is, if it’s still available.

**Appendix: Partnerships**

**State-level**

An example of a partnership that attempts to recognize all of the stakeholders is the *Find-It! Illinois* Program, one of the state-level Government Information Locator Service (GILS) programs around the United States. A strength of the Illinois program is its uniform metadata tagging, which was accomplished by establishing liaisons between the state agency librarians and their own agency webmasters. Through this liaison relationship the web content creators were informed of access issues from the users' viewpoint, the need for standardized metadata and the need for future information retrieval considerations in addition to immediate ones. A tool provided by the Illinois State Library, the Metadata Generator (http://www.finditillinois.org/metadata/webmasters.htm), facilitates the process. Thus, the webmasters or authors embed the content description at the point of origin and have recognized the benefit of enabling users to find their content (Craig, 2001). Because established controlled language such as the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (LCSH) did not accurately describe the content or structure of state government web documents, the Illinois State Library also provides controlled language via the "Jessica Tree" (see the above website), a common subject hierarchy created for the proposed purpose of enabling interstate government information access. At least the first three life-cycle stages summarized by Feeney (1999) have been addressed within this partnership.

**National level**

There are many national digital preservation efforts on a variety of scales.
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The list of national and international partnerships is lengthy. Soete (1997) describes the background of several, including Cornell University and the National Agricultural Library (NAL). Partnerships of the Federal Depository Library Program of the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) include the GILS programs mentioned above and partnerships with OCLC, e.g., the OCLC Electronic Archiving Pilot Project: FDLP/ERIC Digital Library Pilot Project.

NARA and Persistent Object Preservation

NARA has pursued collaborative relationships with six key partnerships forming the core of its Electronic Records Archives (ERA) Program. The Open Archival Information System (OAIS) Reference Model, an international effort, lays the foundation, originating for the purpose of addressing data requirements in the space science community and spearheaded by NASA, but now focusing on any system responsible for long-term preservation of information. The second foundation is the International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems (InterPARES) project, which involves representatives of ten national archives. The core of the ERA program is the Distributed Object Computation Testbed (DOCT), originally an interagency collaboration between the Department of Defense’s Advanced Research Projects Agency and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, with NARA joining the collaboration in 1998. NARA’s specific concern is the long-term retention of records “created, communicated and managed in advanced, high-performance computing environments.” In response to NARA’s concern, the San Diego Supercomputer Center (SDSC), one of the primary research centers involved in DOCT, has invented a preservation method that is actually “an information management architecture built around the objective of preservation of arbitrarily structured sets of virtually any type of electronic record” (Thibodeau, 2001, p. 3). The architecture and preservation method were originally referred to as “Collection-Based Persistent Object Preservation,” then “Persistent Object Preservation,” described in *D-Lib Magazine* in 2000 (see Moore), and the now-enriched architecture have come to be known as “Knowledge-based Persistent Object Preservation.” “The ‘objects’ that can be preserved under this approach can be any digital information that needs to be preserved. For archives, this ranges from individual records, to files of records, entire series of files, and ultimately to entire archival funds; that is, the totality of records created by a person or organization. Key to the ability of the persistent object approach is that it handles in a consistent fashion any arbitrarily complex object at any level of an arbitrary structure. The essential process is to transform the object to a persistent form. This entails identifying and characterizing all significant properties of the objects that are to be preserved. These properties are expressed in formal models. For example, individual records are modeled according to XML Document Type Definitions (DTDs)” (Thibodeau, 2001, p. 8-9). Based on successful repeated and consistent demonstrations, NARA regards the approach as “the most promising one ever suggested for preserving digital information in general, and electronic records in particular... Persistent Object Preservation offers substantial promise for the survival of information assets, whether they are needed for twenty-five years, seventy-five, or forever” (Thibodeau, 2001, p. 4). NARA has now joined the National Science Foundation as a cosponsor of its National Partnership for Advanced Computational Infrastructure (NPACI) program. NARA is now supporting additional research through NPACI into the development of Persistent Object Preservation. Other collaborative research projects are described by Thibodeau, including an approach for applicability in smaller institutions, such as state and university archives. Thibodeau stresses that the demonstrations and prototypes developed by the Electronic Records Archives collaborations are under development and predicts that it will without a doubt be several years before the archives of the future vision will actually become operational.

Global level

Globally, both the United Kingdom and Australia appear to be in the
forefront of the preservation debate. In the UK, the Management Committee of the National Preservation Office (NPO) responded to the action points elicited from a 1995 national conference of the Joint Information Services Committee of the Higher Education Funding Councils (JISC) and the British Library. The result was a program of studies on digital archiving administered by the British Library Research and Innovation Centre and funded by JISC. The working group for the program of studies is the Digital Archiving Working Group (DAWG). The first study by DAWG was the analysis of the CPA/RLG task force report mentioned above to determine its applicability in the UK. The aim of the committee is "to persuade those who are about to embark on digitization projects to consider the long-term archiving of the files they are about to create, and to encourage those bodies that are about to fund digitization programs to ensure that all proposals include a workable archiving strategy" (Feeney, p. 108). JISC is also funding the CEDARS (CURL Exemplars in Digital Archiving) project, which is expected to produce recommendations, guidelines, and models for establishing digital archives.

The National Library of Australia provides current articles, excellent bibliographies and links to projects and case studies at the Preserving Access to Digital Information (PADI) website (http://www.nla.gov.au/padi). PADI receives advice and guidance from an international advisory group, whose members include representatives from RLG, the Library of Congress and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in the United States. In addition to providing a gateway to digital preservation resources, there is an associated discussion list for an idea exchange. One of the objectives of PADI is "to facilitate the development of strategies and guidelines for the preservation of access to digital information" (http://www.nla.gov.au/padi/about.html).

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Cowell, Jacobs and Peterson (2001, October). Managing Digital Content in the FDLP: Frequently Asked Questions. (request by e-mail from either: ecowell@ucsd.edu, jajacob@ucsd.edu or kapeterson@ucsd.edu)


Disconnected: Teaching Information Equity to Undergraduates

by Angelynn King

On the day that I presented this paper as part of the LOEX of the West Conference in Bozeman, Montana, a serendipitously appropriate cartoon appeared on the editorial page of the Bozeman Daily Chronicle. One young woman, upon discovering that her companion does not own a car, a cell phone, a palm pilot, or a DVD player, exclaims, “It’s just so cool how you’re totally into this hip, new voluntary simplicity thing! How do you do it?” The second girl responds that she is poor. “Wow,” replies the first. “I could never do that.”

It is interesting that all of the items mentioned by the comically insensitive character in the cartoon are types of technology - and, with the exception of the car, all of them are types of technology that most of us who are now working in universities grew up without, but which our students take for granted. Inevitable though this perceptual generation gap is, it has tremendous implications for education, library education in particular. When the technology is information technology, and information is power, it is clear that those without technological power have no information - and those without information have no power.

While overall access to information technology itself is growing, wide social disparities persist. The groundbreaking Department of Commerce report on the “digital divide” shows that internet users in the U.S. are overwhelmingly — and increasingly — white, urban, educated and affluent (United States Department of Commerce). But our students tend to believe what they read in the chip-happy, technophilic press — that the internet is a universal communication medium, a kind of “global commons” — and that sooner or later “everyone will be connected.”

If we accept that part of our mission as educators is to prepare students to become well-informed, responsible and rational members of a democratic society, then we cannot overlook the omissions inherent in this view. In addition to teaching information literacy, we need to build an awareness of...
issues of information equity into our instruction. These issues are sparsely
covered in the library literature, and most of the material that is available is
highly academic and does not resonate with undergraduate students, many
of whom have never been confronted with issues of social or economic
class. How can we make this data speak to their condition, so that they do
not leave college and join the burgeoning information economy completely
unaware that there are large segments of the country’s – and indeed the
world’s – population that are technologically “off the map”?

Seminar Background

In the fall semester of 1999, I taught an interdisciplinary first-year seminar
– the first such seminar to be taught by a librarian at the university – entitled
“Information, Knowledge & Power in the Electronic Age.” This course
carried a general education designation in Computing Across the Curricu-
lum, which at the University of Redlands means it was required to address
two areas of computing: usage of technology and the societal aspect of that
usage. In putting together the class, I wanted to combine my normal area of
emphasis – hands-on information literacy skills training – with some
background that would address the issues of access that I see as central to
understanding how electronic information is produced and consumed in our
society.

Throughout the course, I tried to expose the students to coverage of access
issues from a variety of publication types – book chapters, scholarly
articles, newspaper and magazine articles, and online sources. One of the
reasons for this was of course that I was simultaneously teaching them to
find information in all of these formats. But I also wanted to make the point
that these are not just academic issues but everyday problems and concerns
that permeate the whole spectrum of media. The annotated bibliography at
the end of this paper contains the actual reading assignments for the course
as taught, but for future use it could (and should) be updated with more
recent publications when possible, especially in the more ephemeral genres
of newspaper articles and online sources.

The four-credit class was divided into two sections, lecture/discussion and
computer lab. Throughout the semester, as we read and exercised our way
through the syllabus, we uncovered an extensive array of barriers to access.
In this article I will present examples of how different types of classroom
instruction – lecture, computer hands-on, reading, small-group discussion,
and final paper – were used to highlight different aspects of the topic.

Technological Barriers: The Digital Divide

The Department of Commerce report on the Digital Divide made major
headlines when it came out in June of 1999. When I talk about this subject,
I usually concentrate on raw numbers just to illustrate in a very basic way
what I mean when I say “non-universal.” Although the statistics as reported
(United States Department of Commerce) – roughly 94% of American
households with telephone, 37% with PC, 26% with modem, 19% with
internet access – may not raise immediate alarms, a different presentation of
the same numbers – 6% without telephone, 63% without PC, 74% without
modem, 81% without internet – show that while technological access may
be increasing, a substantial majority of the population is not “connected” in
any real sense. And here we are just talking about the United States, one of
the most industrialized nations in the world.

The students were asked to reflect upon their own experiences with comput­
ers at home. Did they have one or more home computer(s), a primary or
secondary modem line, internet access? When did they get it? Who
supports it (i.e. fixes it when it breaks)? How much did they think that
that cost? I did not ask for a show of hands but rather asked each of them to
discuss one aspect of their access to computers during the last few years,
either at home or at school. Even in my rather small classroom of 16
students, very clear demographic lines were visible. Having more informa-
tion about the students than they
have
about each other – I know, for
instance, what their parents do for a living and whether they attended public
or private secondary schools – I saw our own divide in access to technology
primarily as one of income and parental education. But I would not be
surprised if the students themselves perceived a certain racial and ethnic
imbalance.

Another aspect of technological access not mentioned in the government’s
report was the issue of adapted technology for users with disabilities. Due
to the small size of the class, this did not naturally come up in discussion,
but we did discuss it briefly.

Educational Barriers: The Skills Gap

An early reading assignment was the introduction to William Wresch’s
book, Disconnected: Haves and Have-Not in the Information Age, entitled
“Information Rich, Information Poor.” This chapter contrasts the lives of
Theo Schoeman and Negumbo Johannes, two men living in present-day
Windhoek, Namibia. One is a college-educated professional, the other a day laborer. One speaks English, the international language of commerce, the other only his tribal language. One is fortunate enough to be able to live where he works; the other must commute long distances from his village to the city. One is literate, the other is not. (Wresch 1-4)

I asked the students to imagine that they were Mr. Johannes. What are the barriers that stand between them and access to information? As the students put themselves – if only for an hour – into the imaginative position of someone whose challenges far outweigh his advantages, it becomes increasingly clear that access is not just a question of technology.

Even if Mr. Johannes had a computer – which would cost him several years’ salary at least – he would of course have no place at home to plug it in. To get it from his home to his workplace, he would have to carry it with him in the back of the truck where he hitches a ride into the city every day. Having been excluded from any formal education beyond primary grades, he would need training in how to use the computer. Even if training were available, it would have to begin with teaching him to read. And even if he were literate, there would still be the question of language. Analysts estimate that nearly 90% of the over one billion sites on the internet are in English (Sandoval). Although the trend appears to be toward linguistic diversification (Associated Press), that may be misleading in view of the considerable Western European web presence. (I have no figures for how much web content is in Oshiwambo, Mr. Johannes’ native language, but I would be willing to bet that statistically it is very close to zero.)

Even for relatively privileged users, there are invisible skills that lie beneath the surface of language and literacy. Database selection, Boolean logic, controlled vocabulary and weighted search results are concepts that many students will not have encountered before college, and these make up a significant part of the in-class internet instruction. The immediate utility of knowing how to hone a search is fairly obvious when a student is faced with tens of thousands of hits, but what may not be appreciated is how info-glut can be a type of impoverishment in itself. When you have too much information, of questionable quality, the actual amount of useful information can be small or even nonexistent. Until you learn some fairly high-level searching skills, you essentially do not “speak the language” of computerized information.

Logistical and Financial Barriers: Virtually Homeless

A particularly innovative use of web technology is a virtual homelessness game called Hobson’s Choice. The game is mounted on the home page of Real Change, Seattle’s Homeless Newspaper. So in addition to exposing the students to the content, I was also able to show them that there are many different types of organizations selling their wares – whether they be products or ideas – on the internet.

The initial screen of Hobson’s Choice presents the following scenario: You were hospitalized and couldn’t work for 3 weeks. You have no savings or insurance. Your landlord says “Pay up or get out!” (“Hobson’s Choice.”) Several options are presented, from seeking to borrow money from friends and family to attempting to negotiate with people in positions of authority. But as you progress through the game, you find that many options have to be repeated numerous times, and most do not work. Family and strangers are equally unsympathetic to your plight. At some junctures, you find you have no option but to wait.

The limited options, ceaseless repetition, and constant disappointment are an integral part of the game. As the introductory screen points out, the dictionary defines a Hobson’s Choice as a choice between taking what is offered or nothing at all. Many of the students reach their frustration tolerance fairly quickly and want to quit. It should not be surprising that in real life, facing real frustrations in real time, many real people stop trying as well. One poor student spent over an hour in jail. At one point I permitted him to log off and start over, but he immediately landed back in jail. Finally I pardoned him, because I wanted to go home myself.

Of course I realize there is nothing funny about being homeless. But this is as close as the vast majority of them will ever get, as their college educations will serve them as de facto inoculations against poverty. The Hobson’s Choice game enables the instructor to engage the imaginations of the students on a subject that can be quite difficult to get across. They may have played a lot of unmemorable computer games, but I have to believe that the one in which they spent a half-hour living in their cars will stand out.

In a later discussion, I asked the students to reflect back on what it was like when they were virtually homeless. What options did they have for finding out about day labor, food banks, emergency medical care, pubic assistance
all, of course, without any money? If information was available online, where was there access in the neighborhood in which they were likely to find themselves? If they were lucky enough to find themselves working, would anything be open after working hours? At the very least, the discussion engendered an unprecedented respect among this group for the public library.

Social and Cultural Barriers: From City Council to World Arena

A more overtly political assignment for class discussion was the City Council Lab. I asked the students to divide themselves into four groups of four and pretend they were the city council of a small town similar to Redlands. Their task was to formulate a policy for internet filtering of the public terminals in the city library. In doing so, they were expected to satisfy all of the following groups:

1) A group of parents concerned about children’s access to inappropriate (especially sexually explicit) material online.

2) A conservative religious group objecting to a local web page containing information that they say defames their church. (A lawsuit for libel is in process.)

3) Free-speech advocates who maintain that censorship is not the business of the local government. (They threaten to challenge in court any limitations on access imposed by the council.)

4) A local business owners’ group that fears filtering software would limit access to their online advertising, cutting into their profits (and, not insignificantly, into the city’s tax base).

5) The PTA of the high school, which has just suspended seven students for possessing bomb-building instructions downloaded from the internet.

6) The librarians who work at the public library, who point out that they are severely understaffed and have no manpower to spare for additional monitoring of the terminal area.

Oh, and of course they wanted to be reelected, too.

The four groups came up with four completely different solutions, using a variety of tactics from raising taxes for more library staff to requiring underage patrons to carry validated parental permission cards to use networked computers. Each group’s elected representative put its proposal on the board (one group had co-chairs, so essentially half the group was in charge), and then we all voted for the best proposal. Here the spirit of collaboration and open-mindedness broke down; fifteen of the sixteen students voted for their own group’s proposal. The one defector – our jailbird from Hobson’s Choice – was impeached by his co-councilmen. I cannot pretend that this was not a realistic representation of small-town politics.

Reflecting on readings concerning Middle Eastern women online, American cyberhate groups, and the use of the internet by Cambodian opposition leaders, the class briefly discussed the differences between, and the similarities of, “freedom fighting” and insurgency. Who decides who gets online – both as producer and consumer – and how do they decide? It was pointed out that in many places, before you can get online, you have to be able to get out of the area in which you may be sequestered and into the area where the technology is kept. Who are the gatekeepers in your community?

Even in American public schools, gatekeeping can be a factor. A 1998 study carried out in the Pittsburgh public schools discovered that internet access was disproportionately doled out to white male students of higher socioeconomic status. Two reasons were identified in the report. First, the internet was used as a reward for high achievement and good behavior in class, thus underscoring the privilege of students who were already doing well. Second, many teachers were not comfortable with the technology and felt more comfortable handing it over to students who already had computer experience – the same group (Schofield). It should be stressed that the teachers themselves were unaware that they were doing this – gatekeeping is not in itself either heroic or villainous behavior; like many public service functions, the results depend largely on the preconceptions.

Both Sides Now: The Final Paper

In addition to the Computing Across the Curriculum designation mentioned above, the course was also designed to fulfill the freshman/sophomore writing designation, which at Redlands stresses critical thinking and expression. The students were required to turn in a total of 40 pages of writing throughout the semester, the bulk of which was made up of a draft and two substantial rewrites of a 10-12 page research paper. In the final paper, I
asked the students to discuss both the advantages and disadvantages of information technology for different populations, utilizing both the class readings and sources they had found on their own (requiring a minimum number of citations in each category tested both their assigned reading and their information seeking skills.) Most of the students were able, to varying degrees, both to argue from the canon and also to research their arguments beyond the syllabus. In most cases, the quality of the students' writing improved over the course of the semester, although proper citation style proved not to be one of my pedagogical triumphs.

While I am somewhat uncomfortable reinforcing what I see as falsely dichotomous thinking by asking for a “pro/con” argument, I had found the students throughout the semester to be very resistant to – and even threatened by – ambiguity of any kind. This I think is largely a function of age and (lack of) experience. While beginning writers do need to be pushed beyond their comfort zones, pushing too far too fast can cause a complete breakdown in writing ability, so I satisfied myself with requiring them to argue both pro and con. Since most of the issue-oriented writing they have done up to this point has stressed adopting a single position and supporting it, this is a small but significant step toward a more comprehensive essay strategy. If at some point I get some of them back as upperclassmen – the university has a junior/senior writing requirement as well - I will be sure to emphasize that there are more (and sometimes many more) than two sides to every story.

Conclusion

Back when the class was still in its planning stages, my husband, an elementary school teacher, suggested I clearly define my own goals for the students’ learning. I was torn. Was I primarily teaching them information literacy or information equity? The class seemed to consist of a series of dualities: lecture/lab, reading/writing, scholarly/popular, theory/practice. We even met twice a week in two different classrooms, in two different buildings on opposite sides of campus.

As the semester progressed, however, it became apparent that information literacy and information equity are inextricably intertwined. Because we are who we are, we have access to more information than any population in the world – but we are also less aware of what we don’t know. Not feeling bypassed by the Age of Information, we tend to think we have it all. We need to practice seeing from the margins to see clearly from the center.

In my summing up at the end of the semester, I pointed out to the students that they had the same physical access as when they first arrived on campus – the same computers in the same computer lab, open the same number of hours in the same place – but hopefully they had considerably more actual information. And this is what I hope I’ve taught them: there is a lot more to getting on the information highway than just owning a car. You have to know how to drive, where to drive, and when to get on and off. And you have to be careful whom you allow into the front seat with you.

Afterword: About Bias

It is crucially important, if we are teaching critical thinking, to stress to the students that there is bias – some prefer to call it “point of view” – in all sources. This includes government information like the Digital Divide report and extends to the instruction itself. It is intellectually irresponsible to teach students that all information is inherently biased and then present our own instruction as if it were value-neutral. So I always ask them, “Why did I ask you to read this? What am I getting at here? Knowing what you know about me, what do you think is my message?”

My own strongly held belief is that the internet is not a “universal communications medium” at all but rather a universal marketing medium. I constantly stress the issues of authority, audience and agenda and exhort the students to “follow the money.” From here it follows naturally that if you are not a member of an identifiable consuming group, that is, a group that can be counted on for at least ideological patronage, there is no information out there specifically for you. With the exception of the mounters of personal web pages – the electronic equivalent of vanity publishing – no one stands to gain from expending the time and effort necessary to communicate with you.

The course I taught was neither a political science course nor a course in social work. It was an information science course: I presented the information. And while the mere fact of my teaching it was inherently political, I must say that it was nowhere near as political as it could have been. While value-neutral instruction may be an ideal we can approach only asymptotically, disclosing our own agendas is literally the least we can do.

WORKS CITED


Annotated Bibliography of Reading Assignments (Selected)

Books and Book Chapters:

Berman, Sanford. Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People, 2d ed. Jefferson (NC): McFarland, 1993. This work is a must-read for anyone who is interested in - or unaware of - the manner in which the values unspoken inherent in the labeling and organization of information shapes access. In its entirety it is probably too technical and librarianish for undergraduates, but the introduction gives an excellent overview of the reasoning behind Berman's work.

Birkerts, Sven. The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994. Chapter 9, "Perseus Unbound," is a rumination on the relationship among the concepts of information, knowledge and wisdom as they relate to electronic media (and what "learning" then means in this context.)

Brook, James, and Iain Boal, eds. Resisting the Virtual Life: The Culture and Politics of Information. San Francisco: City Lights, 1995. Howard Besser's essay, "From Internet to Information Superhighway," draws parallels between the utopian predictions made for television at its inception and the very similar claims now being made for the internet. Although it begins rather pessimistically, the author closes with some interesting assessments of future trends in fee structure, online privacy and "informtainment."

Grossman, Wendy. Net.wars. New York: New York University Press, 1997. A highly informed and well researched examination of the many aspects of the regulation (or attempted regulation) of online expression, written by a journalist with a distinguished record of covering high-tech topics. Particularly useful in class are Chapter 7, "Exporting the First Amendment," which makes the perhaps obvious but rather neglected point that American-style "freedom of speech" is not a universally recognized concept, and Chapter 9, "Unsafe Sex in the Red Page District," an exploration of the tremendously disproportionate amount of attention directed at internet porn.

Hoshy's streamlined history begins with the handwritten introduction of "Aeroplanes" in 1898 and continues through the addition of "Internet Addiction" in 1998.

Gould, Stephen Jay. "Cordelia's Dilemma." Natural History Feb. 1993: 10-18. Gould provides an interesting take on publication bias in the sciences, pointing out that the reluctance of scientific journals to publish studies that lack dramatic results severely skews any subsequent analysis of the published data. (If nine out of ten similar studies show no correlation, and the tenth is the only one that gets published, "ten percent" is effectively transformed into "one hundred percent" for anyone who does a literature search.) Students found his arguments somewhat difficult to follow, but the subject is important enough to be worth the extra effort.

Heller, Steven. "A Cold Eye: Are Hate Groups Taking Over the Web?" Print Sept./Oct. 1996: 22-24. Reading this article on Neo-Nazi propaganda on the web is what first stimulated my thinking on the subject of web site evaluation and led to my own article (below.) Full of volatile information, the Heller piece is particularly useful to kick off a class discussion on Freedom of Speech.

Holt, Patricia. "Book Brawl: Independent Bookstores, the Internet, Chain Stores and Discount Houses Duke it Out." Whole Earth Summer 1999: 64-67. This description of the role megastores play in the demise of independently owned local companies might be particularly interesting to aspiring business majors, who form a significant percentage of most entering classes. Amazon.com's questionable practice of selling slots on its best-seller lists to publishers bears discussing, even taking into account the obvious editorial slant of the piece.

few before this one, many more since – but this one says it the way that I want to say it, stressing the five criteria of authority, agenda, accuracy, currency and scope. Since I frequently deliver this material as a lecture, in this class I assigned it as a reading instead, freeing up the class time for another activity.

Newspaper Articles:

Dunn, Ashley. “Most of Web Beyond Scope of Search Sites.” Los Angeles Times 8 July 1999: A1+. Adeptly illustrating the relationship between indexing and access, this article points out that well over 80% of web sites are not indexed in any search engine, making them truly “invisible” to most users.


Lieberman, David. “Net Hangs Out of Reach of Have-Nots: Web Study Shows Educated,

Sami, Marium. “A Link to the Outside: Saudi Women Find a Whole New World by Surfing the Internet.” The Spokane Spokesman-Review 15 August 1999: B2. This one-page article on the burgeoning internet presence of Middle Eastern women contains as many talking points as many book chapters, touching on issues from official filtering of sites critical of the Saudi royal family to the difficulty Arab women have finding a female technician to service their computers (having a strange man in the house would be unseemly.)

Online Sources:

Dupont, Kyra and Eric Pape. “E-Mail is a Real Revolution: For a Cambodian Opposition Leader, the Net is a Lifeline.” Salon 15 March 1999. <http://www.salon.com/21st/feature/1999/03/15/feature.html>. This article describes the role of the internet as an underground communication medium for the Cambodian opposition and provides an interesting counterpoint to the Heller article on white supremacist web sites. It is also useful to expose students to fairly mainstream online publications such as Salon and compare them to print sources.


United States Department of Commerce. National Telecommunications and Information Administration. “Falling Through the Net: Americans in the Information Age.” 1999. <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/digitaldivide/>. The official government web site on the Digital Divide contains the text of the three reports and numerous fact sheets. But it should be emphasized to unsophisticated users of government documents that all government information is not created equal: this is an executive branch publication of a democratic administration, with all that implies.

September 11th has changed many things, PLG included. The petition “Emergency Declaration for a Halt to Preparations for Bombing Afghanistan: Librarians Speak Out,” written by Progressive Librarian co-editor Mark Rosenzweig and originally posted on the PLG web page [now posted at www.lib.org/librariansagainstwar], appeared to be PLG’s primary response to those events — and it sparked a debate. Let me say from the beginning that I know that Mark and others of like mind reflected study and thought in their PLG-net postings on September 11th, and to be honest, I have mixed feelings about all of this. As Mark wrote (in response to some of my comments on the Emergency Declaration), “the problem with [PLG position] statements is that we don’t have a mechanism in place for ‘officializing’ them. That’s why the petition format always wins out, because it’s just a question of ‘I’ve written this’...and those who agree should sign it.” As I noted then, the tone of this petition was reasonable, but it had absolutely nothing to do with our existence as a professional organization — even one with as broad a mandate as PLG has proclaimed. That librarians were making these statements was meaningless. In contrast, I argued that librarians or a library organization making statements about ourselves and our profession being dedicated to a form of justice which is embodied in human freedom, open intellectual inquiry, equality, and based on the rule of law would be meaningful, and in my opinion more powerful than simply being against war or injustice on principle. Having read the Emergency Declaration, I am not so naive as to believe American policies have no bearing on the September 11 attacks, but I’m finding the slaughter of Americans difficult to explain away in some Left “position” on foreign policy. (Irving Howe long ago ruefully noted the Left’s compulsion to always have a “position” on everything.) The kind of framework we (PLG and Progressive Librarian) should adopt in response to September 11th and to issues like war, peace, poverty, and justice in general should be more like that of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP):


The events of September 11, 2001, have undermined our sense of
security in many ways... They are violations of our basic trust in
reason. Despite some internal national conflicts, our members have
chosen to work within our democracy with a sense that we could
make a difference in deciding how to use our great power justly in
the world. Although we have been deeply disturbed about injusti
city, poverty, and inequity and the violence... we have also har
bored a belief that we could find ways to remediate these evils by
understanding them. [W]e are called by all the elements of our
identity to reaffirm our faith in the power of knowledge to hold
back the irrational.

Honably defending the principles of the library profession (which is
pretty much a Left position nowadays) is a big enough and hard enough job
as it is. PLG is a minority, but a minority with rock-solid principles in such
an instance. The AAUP’s statement stuck closely to the founding principles
of that organization, and what we post and publish as PLG should too.
Look carefully at PLG’s Purpose and Commitments statements on the web
page or in the journal. It makes it clear that we are a library organization,
whose purpose is to critique and situate libraries in their broader social and
economic context, for the good that libraries do, and for the good of
libraries and librarianship. We’re not a bunch of people who have come
together to oppose war or poverty or injustice — if so others have already
beaten us to the punch. Our positions should be firmly grounded in our
identity to reaffirm our faith in the power of knowledge to hold
back the irrational.

For example, it is fashionable on the Left (following Chomsky) to link
events like the bombing in Yugoslavia, Iraqi sanctions, South American
death squads, and September 11 altogether into a common anti-American-
business-and-military sensibility, and to top it off with being against injusti
city/war/violence generally. This is comforting, but historically dubious at
best. The actors of September 11 were particulars, not generalities and it is
not enough to just tally up all the injustices done in the name of American
business and power, and then simply point to that. Historical causation is
notoriously slippery, and it will be the same as regards September 11 when
we know what can be known. I think Left commentary on September 11 is
too simplistic. Historically speaking, the standard to which we are holding
American foreign and business policy is our own. As empires go, we are
far from the most brutal, the most exploitive, the least just. We sometimes
express astonishment that our democratic principles do not thoroughly
inform the actions of our nation. I am not advocating a corrupt, Kissinger-
like Realpolitik here, but I think that the Left, deploiring and working
against American shortcomings in our actions (overt and covert), is perhaps
participating in something more fundamentally American than we realize. I
think mindfulness of that connection and that perspective would do us good
in making our case as PLG. We will not do justice to our ideas with
simplistic reasons for the toll of September 11. Our moral reasoning has to
make more fundamentally sound distinctions, while continuing to hold
America to its stated values.

In the end, I’m less concerned about PLG taking the “correct” position than
I am in taking intellectually defensible positions on our profession’s
grounds. That is why there is an editorial exchange on this in the pages of
Progressive Librarian and that is why members received a ballot to vote on
a structural adjustment in the way PLG “does business.” In the absence of
a mechanism to debate statements/positions — and why we were taking
them — what we posted on the webpage was PLG’s defacto position. PLG
either needed to “speak” through many voices — or we had to organize
better to speak with a voice. As Elaine Harger wrote,

PLG statements do need to be... focused on what we as
librarians can contribute to whatever the issue at hand
might be. But that does not exclude taking positions on
“non-library” issues. As progressives/radicals/leftists we
are all too aware that libraries play a role in the bigger
world and we cannot ignore that. PLG does not support
the notion of neutrality in librarianship. We are advocates
for the library as a facilitator of democracy, of social,
economic and political justice [and] we absolutely do
need to communicate much more than we do on issues
that we think are important [and] hammer out a position
that represents the best thinking of an organization.

That is what Mark and I are doing through this editorial “debate.” I fully
agree with Mark’s reasoning in his PLGnet posting “Why Librarians Must
Debate War & Peace.” The issues he raised go to the heart of the progressi
agenda inherent in librarianship and the intellectual freedom responsi
bilities PLG tries to uphold. It is the same reason I have written — and will continue to write — critically about the market environment which dominates the production and dissemination of information. These are broad (but I would argue, legitimate) professional concerns. Mark, Elaine and I wrote a reasoned defense of librarianship’s involvement in social issues in the June 1994 American Libraries. We attacked the dramatic narrowing of “library” issues by ACRL & ALA and made a key point: “Clearly, not every social and political issue is a library one, but [we have as our] role precisely the raising of such issues so that their implications for the profession can be discussed, argued, and voted on.” In other words, our social and political concerns are broad, but in the end they actually should relate to our field — and not just in the most tangential way. PLG can be a force in the field of librarianship if our positions are intellectually defensible and based on our founding principles.

John Buschman

Rosenzweig Responds:

Although we have large areas of common concern about the effects of advanced market society, corporate-dominated globalization, and the commercial colonization of “the commons” (along, it seems, with every aspect of cultural life); on the significance of this for librarianship, librarians and libraries in society; and although we are both committed to an activist stance against acquiescence to these phenomena as they encroach on the cultural/educational sphere in which we as librarians function; and although we share a much broader sense of the scope and character of librarians legitimate professional concerns than mainstream library theory and practice generally allows (broader, I might say, than even John seems to realize!), as well as a commitment to the application of critical social theory and political economy to the study of these concerns, my co-editor and friend John Buschman and I have many significant political points of disagreement, including perspectival differences on, among other things, the nature of the U.S. left in general, its history, its responsibilities, its character, its prospects, its successes, its weaknesses.

What unites John and me and what brings us together, along with the other editors of Progressive Librarian in common projects, is at the very least our shared feeling of the obligation to provide a forum which wouldn’t otherwise exist for dissident, critical, alternative views of library issues and their context, from the left-liberal to the social anarchist, from the social-democratic to the neo-Marxist.

In my rejoinder here I am more interested in addressing the substantive rather than the processual issues John raises, in part because we are in the process of sorting those out at both the level of re-organization of PLG nationally and of the work of the editorial board of the journal.

As regards PLG’s mandate I must disagree with John when he states, almost in passing, that, after all, what we “progressives” are really about is defending basic library values which, in his opinion, are, in and of themselves “left’ enough” in the present context.

In reality, we do that by default, because of the unwillingness of the profession to live up to its own credo, its own professional values, its own policy statements, and by virtue of the fact that we “radicals” are the only ones who will defend the principles which the mainstream has abandoned. We have taken responsibility for what the profession is rapidly disencumbering itself from. But that is not the limit of our mission as “progressives.” It is only the burden we’ve quite naturally, if paradoxically, assumed in order to even get to our mission. Our responsibility goes far beyond that. The recognition of the need to do that was what precipitated the founding of PLG and its journal Progressive Librarian in the first place.

PLG began by trying to expand the realm of library concerns; we felt that it was necessary to examine librarianship’s myths of “neutrality” and accept a partisanship against the power relations and agendas which define and constrain the democratic and emancipatory purposes of libraries just as they also constrain other educational and cultural institutions and the flows, contents, uses of knowledge itself, especially as “information.” We tried to reach out as partners to other Left cultural and educational workers in the face of the Right’s attacks on the values which are embodied in our fields’ mutual and particular commitments and, alongside radicals in other areas of work, elaborate a more critical and liberatory theory and practice.

We wanted to help infuse librarianship, as it is practiced and as that practice is formulated and taught, with the explicit inclusion of social justice concerns, in particular the belief in the necessity of the expansion of
democracy to afford the material preconditions of, among other things, the
equality of access we invoke and in the need for the elaboration of what we
call "cultural democracy" by people engaged in our kind of work; we
promoted the centrality of these social concerns to librarianship, as to other
similar fields of activity, in which figured prominently such things as
anti-racism, egalitarian affirmative action for the least advantaged in the
information environment as in the society as a whole, opposition to the
negative effects of corporate globalization on cultural and educational
institutions, commitment to sustainable democratic development, to peace­
ful, rational conflict resolution rather than the recourse to violence and
repression destructive of the framework for a democratic culture (especially
State-sanctioned violence and repression). We underlined the contribution
libraries can and should make — but are not necessarily making — to
citizen empowerment and the promotion of reading and research contribu­
tory to the just solution of social, economic and cultural conflicts. Some­
thing enshrined, by the way, in the active, conscious provision of alternative
viewpoints in our collections at all levels of library action and in the
provision of the tools and intellectual environment in which these could be
most usefully and freely accessed and considered.

In my opinion the above commitments also commit library radicals to
encourage the engagement of librarians in the larger issues of the day which
affect the social context of librarianship. John suggested — and I agree —
that the American Association of University Professors acted wish such
engagement (quite expeditiously) when it issued a statement on the war
which, at least, showed recognition of the fact that the war had implications
for their members and that a statement of the association’s concern was
necessary.

Those commitments engage us in certain aspects of U.S. foreign policy,
human rights matters, global structural inequality and its consequences,
international librarianship as a political sphere of conflict as well as cooper­
ation, etc.

With that in mind, shaken as we all were by the events of 9/11 and
disagreeing with my position on the war and how/where it was expressed
(more about that later), and I assume with PLG or Progressive Librarian
taking such a position, John has implicitly posited a dichotomy, well within
the broad currents which PLG and PL contain, that defines his political
position versus mine in order to more generally illuminate his sense of what
attitude he believes should represent the most compelling basis for PLG’s

work: Irving Howe on the one hand and Noam Chomsky on the other. This
is not to imply that John is a follower of Howe’s political philosophy nor
that I am a member of some Noam Chomsky fan club. But it does highlight
two very different understandings of America, its internal dynamics and its
role in the world which is reflected in policies and actions, affecting the
answer to the question of where and how left librarians should get involved.

John seems to have more of an affinity for Howe’s sense of politics and
what makes America tick. And I admit, with certain significant reservations,
to much more of an affinity to Chomsky than Howe on matters of analysis
of the character and context of U.S. involvement in the world arena and
how that is related to domestic political issues and policies.

As a reader of both the late Irving Howe and the voluble and very much
alive Noam Chomsky, to the extent that we are examining the globalized
social context of our work, I personally believe the fundamental questioning
of the roots of American foreign policy and the effects of its hegemony and
attempts to secure that, is not knee-jerk “anti-Americanism,” but the duty of
U.S. intellectuals, who bear responsibility for the rationalization or ques­
tioning of their own country’s policies, first and foremost. I believe this is
where Chomsky is coming from.

The qualifications of my feelings about Chomsky are methodological and
have to do with the peculiarly unique vantage point from which he often
seems to assume to assay the world (about which almost all others are
somehow deceived), and his inclination to imply coordinated and conscious
manoeuvres or shared deliberate intentions where one needn’t make such an
assumption, but I admit to being one of those who are very glad for
linguistics theorist Chomsky’s unique, well-researched and documented­
but not well-distributed or widely discussed — contribution to at least some
semblance of critical political discourse and fundamental dissent in the U.S.
Chomsky is also closed out of almost all public policy debate by the
mainstream media. For me, Chomsky, more than fully qualified to be a
bona fide member of the mandarin intellectual establishment, has quite
consciously rejected that option which would require a political posture of
being above the fray. I find that admirable.

On the other hand, I have learned much from the late Irving Howe — a
genuine member of the accepted and acceptable “left-wing” of the intellectu­
al aristocracy — as a literary critic and as a chronicler of Jewish culture
on New York City’s Lower East Side in the earlier part of the last century.
Neither his being a literary critic nor Chomsky’s being a linguist prevented either from being public intellectuals (although quite unequal participants) with reputations based on their politics. This is not a question of their expertise or qualifications to opine on what have come to increasingly be seen as specialized matters for experts, that is, all the elements of public policy.

Since we are discussing reactions to 9/11 and the measures taken following that, it is not inappropriate to point out that Howe’s sense of Left politics, as a political figure of the “acceptable Left,” publicly and vociferously supported every U.S. intervention and war in his adult lifetime. He was in favor of the Korean War, the Vietnam War (until very, very late in the game and then halfheartedly in opposition) and was, until his death, a virtually uncritical defender of U.S. policy supporting Israel, denouncing all criticism on the left as “anti-Semitic.” He was in favor of all the U.S. interventions in Central America and the Caribbean. He was opposed to the ‘60s student movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the Black consciousness movement, the anti-intervention movements around Central America and the coalitions against U.S. support to the contras in Nicaragua. Yes, he was on the left of the Democratic Party as regarded some, perhaps most, domestic issues, but also was sometimes indistinguishable even there from his neo-Conservative friends on issues like affirmative action. He believed — not entirely baselessly — a “romantic ‘Third Worldism’” and denigration of American democracy was the principle basis of the protest movements which pointed over and again to U.S. culpability for plowing much of the fertile soil for the development of things like the very terrorism we have now to confront. I would guess Howe would have decried my anti-war position and approved of bombing Afghanistan — and even moving on to Iraq perhaps — as legitimate State responses to a terrorist criminal conspiracy not of nations but of a fanatic cohort of a relatively small number individuals, speaking in the name of the entire Islamic world but clearly responsible only to themselves. Even with the rationalizations of a “democratic socialist” like the late Irving Howe in hand could I have done anything but issue the “cri de coeur” during the obvious run-up to war in my EMERGENCY DECLARATION FOR A HALT TO PREPARATIONS FOR BOMBING AFGHANISTAN: LIBRARIANS SPEAK OUT! (on the web at…..) which sparked this controversy among us leading to this editorial exchange, as I watched in horror not only the terror incidents but the preparations for the wholesale, intensive bombing of Afghanistan which was being openly planned as a collective punishment for 9/11 disingenuously presented as a search for justice, nor while a “war on terrorism” was announced (if not officially declared) entailing immediate restrictions on U.S. civil liberties and suspension of constitutional rights here at home. My sense of professional responsibility made it imperative for me to speak out on my own behalf as a librarian, hopefully along with other librarians — right then and there — against what was coming down and asked others to join me. I did that as a concerned, committed professional and citizen, not as a representative of any organization or publication. I’m sorry if John or anybody else got any other impression. It was not my intention to stake out the position of PLG or the editorial board of PL and I regret if my personal action was confused as action in some official capacity. I thought I had made it clear in the original posting that it represented my view alone: unfortunately when reposted a note to that effect was excised as extraneous and that contributed to the confusion. It was subsequently revised so that its provenance was absolutely clear. PLG or PL may or may not have been able to come up with a statement on 9/11 and what followed, but I realized, as John points out, the mechanism for doing so was not even in place. I could not let that prevent me from speaking at least on my own behalf as a librarian and hoping to rally, as individuals, members of ALA, of SRRT, of PLG, if possible, also acting in their personal capacities.

In closing, perhaps it is useful to note that this exchange, in which we cannot reconcile political differences and which demonstrates how different our political sensibilities are, itself shows that PLG and the PL journal represent, in their own ways, and quite honorably, a very wide spectrum of opinion which sometimes easily — and sometimes not so easily — is broad enough to contain two editors (and probably more!) along with many members with very different views of what the Left is and should do, and what the Library Left’s responsibilities and proper areas of concern and modes of action should be. That is a healthy thing that pluralism should be cultivated as long as we are working on a common project. I’m sure we will at least proceed in a more organized manner and set up the mechanisms needed to make editorial and organizational decisions more consistently and less arbitrarily, thanks in part to John’s insistence and our airing of these differences. I only hope we don’t do so in a manner in which we ever lose the “rebel spirit” which has animated PLG and Progressive Librarian from their inception.

Mark Rosenzweig
FROM THE ALTERNATIVES LIBRARY

LeftWords: Another Country
by Lynn Andersen

Just over the northern U.S. border, independent publishers, writers and bookstores are struggling against corporate forces identical to their counterparts in the United States. Chain bookstores and publishing conglomerates in Canada are using the tactics of underselling and homogenization of information that have become all too familiar to those of us living south of the border. We in the U.S. don’t hear much about it, but it’s very real to Canadians, and they are fighting the power. Independent Canadian writers, publishers and bookstores are actively engaged in keeping alive and strong the voices that dare to criticize the corporatization of the media and the disingenuous policies of government leaders who are for sale to the highest bidder. Unfortunately, there is precious little cross-border awareness between the Canadian groups and their counterparts to the south. U.S. citizens probably know less about their northern neighbors than they do about Tierra del Fuego. Because I was lucky enough to have friends that invited me to a very special book fair in Ontario, I had a chance to get a bit of first-hand education about the situation there.

The 3rd Annual LeftWords Festival of Books and Ideas — did anyone in the U.S. know about the 1st and 2nd? — took place on Sunday, November 5, 2001, at the New College, University of Toronto. Gathered together in the main hall were over 30 bookstores representatives, publishers and activists as well as 15 presentations by writers, activist groups and educators. I was the only “American” present unless you count the ones who are trying to become Canadian citizens. I hope this article will convince more progressives from the U.S. and elsewhere to explore Toronto and find out what’s going on there. Meanwhile, here is some information and perhaps incentive to travel.

LeftWords was started by Michael Jackal, York University Bookstore; Peter Steven, Between the Lines Press; Peter Saunders, Garamond Press; Anne Brackenbury, an independent organizer; and Lindsay Sharpe, Fernwood Press. The first gathering was held in St. Lawrence Hall, downtown Toronto, where roughly 700 people passed through the exhibits. The public space was a perfect location for LeftWords but was too small to accommodate the number of people attending the event. The second year saw a 25% drop in attendance due to the relocation. This year, the third, the attendance hit over 500. The 2001 organizing team included everyone listed above except Anne. The original organizers sought collaboration for setting up the conference with the Catalyst Centre, a group that shares its philosophy. Together, the team put together a broader program with fewer academic and more community oriented presentations. Because of the expanded programming, more young people were attracted to this year’s event than in the two previous years. For progressive-minded booklovers — and I assume most PLG librarians are — this was a great place for gathering new sources of materials, meeting and hearing the activist/authors who did presentations and discussing social and political issues affecting all people, across all borders.

The colloquia were an important part of the forum. The following is just a tiny representation of the presenters. Kicking off the festivities was a quartet of writers who presented the book Resist (Fernwood Books), a collection of experiences from people who chose to protest at the Quebec FTAA (Forum on Tariffs and Trade Agreements) summit. In another discussion, Martin Morris and John Anderson talked of the attempt to extend the capitalist market into all sectors of society. Further study on the issue is available in their book, Commodification of Everything: The Sins of Privatization (Studies in Political Economy and Rebuilding the Left). The Labour-Teacher program of Frontier College had representatives to explain their program of recruitment, training and placement of their graduates as well as 15 presentations by writers, activist groups and educators. I was the only “American” present unless you count the ones who are trying to become Canadian citizens. I hope this article will convince more progressives from the U.S. and elsewhere to explore Toronto and find out what’s going on there. Meanwhile, here is some information and perhaps incentive to travel.

The Labour-Teacher program of Frontier College had representatives to explain their program of recruitment, training and placement of their graduates as teachers on farms, railway camps, factories, and other places where people live and work, thereby providing education to workers who don’t have access to mainstream education. In one of the afternoon presentations, three of the forty-three contributors to Turbo Chicks: Talking Young Feminists (Sumach Press) shared their insights into what feminism is and where they think it’s going. Allyson Mitchell, Lisa Bryn Rundle and Lara Karaian talked about sexuality, constructs of race and class, feminist education, weight and body image, feminist activism and feminist theory. At the same time, Ann Hansen was on hand to talk about her new book, Direct Action: Memoirs of an Urban Guerilla (Between the Lines). After serving seven years in prison for being part of the group, the Squamish Five, who bombed the Litton Systems plant in Toronto (the plant manufactured guidance systems for Cruise missiles), Ann told her story and answered questions.
about her life as an activist. In another room, the consequences reforms have for women as health care providers and patients was discussed by Pat Armstrong, author of *Exposing Privatization: Women and Health Care Reform in Canada* (Garamond Press). Pat was on hand to discuss the effects of and to spur action in health care policy, information the United States could well put to use as it struggles with its own dysfunctional health care system. The Toronto Dollar and Local Currencies were discussed by Joy Kogawa, Susan Bellan and David Walsh. Over 200 businesses in downtown Toronto and Riverdale use the local currency and 10% of all Toronto Dollars purchased go to the Toronto Dollar “Spirit at Work” fund to support job creation for low-income people. And then there was a ‘zine making workshop, and the launching of the Socialist Resister 2002, and John Saul with his book *Millennial Africa: Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy* (Africa World Press), and Jenny Horsman, *Too Scared to Learn: Women, Violence and Education*, and music by Eve Goldberg and the Spadina Road Tabernacle Band, and a whole lot of discussion, seriousness and laughter. And, it was FREE!

I had a chance to talk to some of the vendors at the book fair while I was at it. May Lui, one of the co-managers of the Toronto Women’s Bookstore was a representative organizer of LeftW ords for the first time this year. The bookstore is struggling with the onslaught of corporate booksellers but is surviving because of a loyal customer base and, I might add, a darn good selection of books. LeftWords offers great exposure for the store, which — as May says — “goes on doing it for the love of doing it.” Lois Pike from Sumach Press, a new publisher, was at LeftWords for the second time and is interested in doing it again. Joel, from the *International Socialist and Socialist Worker* journals, was a vendor for the first time. He liked it and will return for the next one. So will I. I even won five books for the Alternatives Library. No one was there to claim the winnings for the last drawing, so Matt Adams of the Catalyst Centre held a voice vote at the end of the fair. The library got the prize. It was a guilt-offering because the library inadvertently got left off the list of cosponsors. LeftWords closed with a protest song, of course. A group of us adjourned to a nearby pub where we continued discussing the issues raised during the conference as well as two big issues on everyone’s mind — the attacks of September 11th and the war in Afghanistan. In speaking our thoughts, apprehensions and frustrations, we shared some unspoken common ground where all borders disappeared, where our common humanity was a palpable experience, one that we silently wished for all people.

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**DOCUMENTS**

**Letter to the American Library Association Annual Meeting, 6/01**

by Dr. Marta Terry

Dear colleagues:

I have come here because of an invitation from a group of American librarians headed by Ann Sparanese and the ALA Executive group to share with you some common professional worries and concerns, but above all as a way to help to break the information blockade that my country is suffering, among other things, from the economic embargo Cuba is subject to.

I come to tell you about the worries and concerns of the Cuban dependent librarians. I also come to speak about our success and aspirations. I come to speak about our uneasiness regarding the misinformation some, or perhaps many, of our American colleagues might have about our libraries, our country and our way of living. Cuban librarians are concerned that all the disinformation will further deepen the already deep waters of the Florida Straight that separates our two countries.

I come to bring a message of solidarity from those Cuban librarians to all of you who have refused to believe some absurd campaigns of disinformation about our professional practice and our beliefs, and have decided to go see for yourselves, to draw your own conclusions, and then come back and fight hard about what you consider to be truthful and honest.

I also come to thank you all for your interest towards my country and my profession and to try to increase that interest that is giving birth to new relations between the American library community and the Cuban library community. Until very recent times relations between Cuban and American librarians have been scarce and sporadic based on personal contacts among a few of us. Nowadays it is perfectly clear that a different approach is
emerging, just precisely an approach characterized by more understanding, collaboration, cooperation and common professional respect.

I said, at the opening of this presentation that I had come to tell you about the worries and preoccupations of the Cuban dependent librarians. It is not a question of my poor English. You have understood quite well. I mean it. I mean that I have come to talk (allow me to repeat it) on behalf of Cuban dependent librarians, because we are and represent those librarians who live in Cuba depending (shall I say defending too?) on our socialist society, simple, honest, egalitarian, that society we build every day with our work.

We are those librarians who depend on a child’s smile of satisfaction after having read a book of stories (sometimes all worn out because so much use and very little possibility of replacement) and we depend upon the child asking us “Is there another one to be read? I liked that story so much.” We also depend upon the thanks the old retired laborer gives us when he has just finished reading for the third time a biography of Napoleon or Abraham Lincoln, or Lenin, or Antonio Maceo because he has already read the Marti biography more than five times. And then the old man tells us “You see compañera what I like to know is how things were before, I like to know how those great men were, I like to know all they had to do to build their world.” And how much we depend on the new and young writer who is preparing his or her first book for the David Award and who has consulted us thousands of times about the sound or the correct spelling of some very important phrase in his or her work!

We depend on the bus that takes such a long time to arrive — because there is a shortage of buses and fuel — so that we can reach our library on time which might be one of the 390 public libraries (at least 1 in each municipality and 1 in each province), or one of the more than 3,000 school libraries, or one of the more than 50 university libraries or the scientific and technological units of the scientific centers throughout the country.

Sometimes transportation is not the bus or the guagua. It might also be a bicycle or the ride of some unknown compañero or compañera with a car, and so we depend on them to be able to get to our job: at the library. We also depend on the lack of electric energy or light bulbs to perform our duty, and when a blackout happens we simply change the positions of chairs and tables and put them near the doors and windows to be able to use the sun’s natural light. Or, sometimes we have been obliged to break the unwritten rule of not circulating the library’s sole copy of a title, because that particular title is needed by someone who has to study or read it to pass an examination or conclude a term paper. And so we give the book on loan so that the reader will be able to study it when the electricity is back on, long after the library is closed. And we cross our fingers and wish that book back in our stacks because it might be impossible to replace it if it gets lost.

I have chosen a few examples out of hundreds that happen in the daily work of many Cuban librarians. Those Cuban librarians, who depend on the satisfaction of our users, insist on feeling we and our profession are useful and needed in our society.

But I am sure that if we take out the peculiar and difficult conditions we live under in Cuba which make our work so much different (sometimes full of anguish) when compared to other places, many of you if you are real librarians — and I think you are! — will find those human contact (librarian-user) stories not so strange and alien to you.

There still are other cases we must mention that are not so pressing for you as they are for us: the lack of a title or better the lack of the information our users might need.

Sometimes a user is looking for a title he or she is interested in or he or she has heard of. It may happen that the book is on loan. Well! The user gets frustrated because some one else has what he needs and we only have two or three copies for circulation. But it might be that the book is not in our collections, or that the request is for a scientific or technical journal, or a collection of essays needed by a student or a professor or an engineer and the material is simply not available. And when this happens it is just because we have very few titles and copies because of all the circumstances of the blockade by your government over my country.

The colleagues who have made presentations before me have referred to other details and so I do not think I should repeat those themes. But in the midst of all these arguments and discussions it seems we are taking for granted that the books our people need to read are just novels and political works, and we are forgetting that, in the newly born XXI century, information is the most appreciated resource and that libraries are centers for information and formation and the first is an essential part of the second.

Do we have to ask ourselves how many copies of the last edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica can be found in the main Cuban libraries? Or how
many copies of the latest edition of *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*? How many libraries have been able to acquire the Nobel Prize collections that are so much needed by literature students and professors as well as by the general public? How many books of international art reproductions published in the 90’s can be found in the public or university libraries in Cuba?

Or let’s be more modern — how many CD-ROMs? Has somebody asked himself or herself how Cuban libraries acquire CD-ROMs? Has anybody looked at the reference collections our students have for studying librarianship in Cuba? Has anyone seen the latest editions of the *World of Learning* or the *International Who’s Who* in any Cuban public or even university library? Does anyone remember what caused us to launch the *Ediciones R* collection?

We are not trying to arouse your sympathy, we are just opening the window a tiny to show how little freedom the dependent Cuban librarians have to acquire information from abroad. Money, as it is well known, is difficult to get but sometimes we do have the money but we do not have the freedom to acquire what we want to purchase directly from the publishing houses, and so already high prices get higher and higher putting purchases out of our reach.

On the other hand, to say “we have been through” is quite an euphemism because, no matter what achievements we have made during the last two or three years in the quality of life and the economy of our country we can state that the special period is starting to pass, but the blockade is as intact as it ever was and is even harder after recent laws and bills passed by the U.S. Congress. And I am most afraid that if I write, at this moment, to the editors of *Fortune Magazine* as I did when I worked at the Junta Central de Planificacion in 1964, they will answer with the same phrase: “we are sorry but we cannot accept subscriptions from your country.”

You may ask: How come you are still there? How can you speak about not having problems with illiteracy, and having hundreds of medical doctors, and trying to be a most cultured people, if you do not have the facilities to acquire the books you need for all that? That is Cuba’s big question. How is it possible?

Well, it is possible first of all because the immense capacity of each of us as individuals to sacrifice and because of the social resistance of the Cuban people. Our daily work of building and rebuilding, of believing in the justice of our cause. And it is also possible because of the solidarity of many people in many parts of the world. Just to return to our profession, for instance, we professors of librarianship and information science at the University of Havana are able to navigate the Internet because we have a fairly well-equipped laboratory to work in. We can navigate but we cannot acquire many articles that the many commercial and non-commercial databases offer. Complete text offering is still very rare. We have found that some authors are generous enough to send us reprints when we approach them just by simple mail.

I mentioned that, at these moments, a slow but sure economic recovery is taking place because of the tremendous effort the country is making. We are able to start to renew some titles in our collections due to the gradual recovery of our publishing industry, and some of the very deteriorated public libraries buildings are being reconstructed. The electric energy cutbacks have diminished to almost 95%, so they are not a daily problem and library evening hours are being restored. Three years ago the launching of the *programa de la lectura* was made with the same old books and with the new editions that have started to be published by the Instituto Cubano del Libro. In that way we started to fight for the recovery of the reading habits of our population that the long night of the special period was about to make disappear.

New ideas assisted in this work, such as the Minerva Club program that provides library constituents access to some of the primary works of world literature by paying a very small contribution.

During the successful battle for the returning home of Elián González — in which the American people was so determined — it was revealed that the excellence attained within the artistic and political cultures of our people during 40 years of revolutionary fight has fed a new fight to keep alive something we call the battle of the ideas. That battle has a lot of different fronts and only one objective — to make our people more cultured and well-informed so that the revolution will go on being unbeatable. Or, to put it in better words, to make it much more unbeatable still.

Along those lines the schools of art that were responsible in the 70's for the great amateur artists movement have been reestablished. Music, dance, drama, and the visual arts are being promoted as part of big community movement. Entrance to university, careers in education, humanities and
social sciences are being broadened. Computers for primary and secondary schools are being acquired so that in a short period all the young people of the country may have access to these technologies just as youngsters do in what is called the first world and the information society. University-for-All courses (English, literature, art history, etc.) are exploring new ways to reach everyone interested via TV. And what becomes more interesting for us librarians — the library work of the country is being renewed.

Lessening of the blockade? Would it mean that we suddenly have more opportunities to buy the books we need (and shall I add the medicines?) than we had, let’s say, two or three months or three years ago? Would it mean that we could buy directly from McGraw-Hill or Macmillan or the University of Chicago Press? Would it mean that we could click Barnes & Noble and get the titles we need? Would it mean that we have all the money needed to acquire copyrights to the best foreign authors to publish them in Cuba and sell them at very low prices in large print runs as we use to, even if those copies cannot be as many as they used to be before the hardening of the blockade and the establishment of the special period?

By no means. We only advance inch-by-inch in our revolutionary struggle.

Up to now we have tried to show a panorama of our difficulties, our realities, our new achievements in fields that may be near to your professional interests as well as to your human heart and feelings of solidarity. It is not my objective to describe the history of Cuban Revolution in such a small space of time. What I want is to make an approach among us, to open a panorama of understanding based on unprejudiced exchange between professional and human based on truth, legality, and respect for the right of each country to live and to defend the project of the society their individuals choose to live in.

We, Cuban librarians and in particular those members of the Cuban Association of Librarians (Asociación Cubana de Bibliotecarios — ASCUBI) would very much like, if it were possible, to launch a programme that would allow American librarians to have access to our literature, to our authors, the established as well as the newest, those of the XIX century as well as those of the XX and the upsurging in XXI. We would like to know what is read about Cuba in American libraries, how many times the computers of American libraries contact our websites to know our own versions of our reality, our opinions, our success in sports, our doctors saving lives in Central America and Africa and Haiti and our people demonstrating from the Plaza de la Revolución onward. We would like to find ways to be able to enter many small humble American libraries like ours or the immense ones to search catalogues and locate Cuban editions of the works of Ché, the speeches of Fidel, the poems of Guillen, Retamar, Fina, Cintio, Pablo Armando, las décimas de Waldo Leyva o de Alexis Pimienta, the short stories of Heras Leon, or the essays of Graziella Pogolotti.

We would like to find in your children’s collections copies of El cochero azul o El caballo de cora for your children to know as ours know about Huckleberry Finn.

We would like it if in our catalogues and stacks it were possible to find the novels of Toni Morrison or Gore Vidal or William Kennedy and we could replace in our collections the lost copies of Ralph Ellison’s The Invisible Man or Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass, or the anthologies of American short stories published in 60’s or some of the works of Dreiser...

Martin Luther King said he “had a dream.” That dream meant equality, solidarity, understanding, peace. The Cuban librarians share that dream and make it ours.

Cuban librarians depend on our collections, on our readers, on the honesty and passion we put in our work. We do not tell our readers what to believe — we tell them read! That was what Fidel thought many years ago and we practice the word and the spirit of it. We also depend on the solidarity and understanding of our colleagues everywhere in the world. We need allies in our battle of ideas.

I thank you for accompanying us in this great little battle we have fought today.

1The David Award is a literary prize for young writers sponsored by the Cuban Union of Writers and Artists
MEMO TO:
International Relations Committee, ALA

by Ann Sparanese

To: Pat Wand, Chairperson, ALA-IRC Latin American & Caribbean Subcommittee

From: Ann C. Sparanese, SRRT Action Councilor
Date: January 8, 2001
Subject: Hearing on Charges by “Friends of Cuban Libraries”

Thank you for inviting me to speak before your Subcommittee. These notes have been prepared for your consideration.

I am the head of Adult & Young Adult Services at the Englewood Public Library in New Jersey. I have been an active member of ALA for ten years. As well as serving on SRRT Action Council and its International Responsibilities Task Force, I have been a member of YALSA’s Best Books for Young Adults Committee, the AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups, and I am the current chairperson of RUSA’s John Sessions Memorial Award Committee. I also have a long history of interest in, and travel to, Cuba. I attended the 1994 IFLA Conference in Havana and my most recent visit was this past November, when I visited Cuban libraries and met with Havana members of ASCUBI, the Cuban Library Association. I have followed with interest, and argued against, the allegations of Mr. Kent since he began his campaign in 1999. The Social Responsibilities Round Table passed the attached resolution regarding the FCL at midwinter conference one year ago.

Mr. Kent would like to present his proposal as a no-brainer, a simple question, a single pure concept: intellectual freedom. But it is not. This paper is respectfully submitted with the hope that the subcommittee may approach Mr. Kent’s requests with a fuller appreciation of history, the facts and the issues.

1. Who are the “Friends of Cuban Libraries?”

This is how Robert Kent and Jorge Sanguinetty described themselves at the outset of their campaign for Cuban “independent libraries.”

Before going to the debate, however, the Friends of Cuban Libraries would like to answer some inquiries from the public regarding the goals and origin of our organization. The Friends of Cuban Libraries, founded on June 1, 1999, is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization which supports Cuba’s independent libraries. We oppose censorship and all other violations of intellectual freedom, as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, regardless of the ideology or leadership of whatever Cuban government is in office. The founders of the organization are Jorge Sanguinetty and Robert Kent. Jorge Sanguinetty resides in Miami. He was the head of Cuba’s Department of National Investment Planning before he left the country in 1967. He was later associated with the Brookings Institution and the UN Development Programme. He is the founder and president of Devtech, Inc. He is also a newspaper columnist and a commentator on Radio Marti. Robert Kent is a librarian who lives in New York City. He has visited Cuba many times and has Cuban friends whose viewpoints cover the political spectrum. During his visits to Cuba Robert Kent has assisted Cuban, American, and internationally-based human rights organizations with deliveries of medicines, small sums of money, and other forms of humanitarian aid. On four occasions he has taken books and pamphlets to Cuba for Freedom House and the Center for a Free Cuba, human rights organizations which have received publication grants from the U.S. Agency for International Development; on three occasions his travel expenses were paid wholly or in part by Freedom House or the Center for a Free Cuba. On his last trip to Cuba in February, 1999, Robert Kent was arrested and deported from the country.

Many references to Mr. Sanguinetty appear on the Internet. He speaks widely on the subject of returning free market enterprise to Cuba. As a commentator on Radio Marti, Mr. Sanguinetty is or was an employee of the United States government. Cubans on the island have always listened to Miami radio and even some TV stations. But Radio Marti is a propaganda station directly controlled by the most right-wing elements of the Cuban-American exile community, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF). It is not a neutral voice or a bastion of “free expression.” It has
never aired the voices of liberal elements of the Cuban-American community who favor the normalization of relations with Cuba. Mr. Sanguinetti is simply a professional propagandist.

In October 1995, President Clinton presented a $500,000 government grant to Freedom House for publishing and distributing pamphlets and books in Cuba. The funds were also devoted to paying for individuals to travel to Cuba as tourists in order to make contact with dissident groups, organize them and fund them. Robert Kent is evidently one of these couriers — another propagandist on an illegal, paid-for mission on behalf of Freedom House. He is not the only American to be sent on such a mission, and be deported. Kent evidently believes that by acknowledging his sponsor, this somehow legitimizes his activities. But it only demonstrates the nature of his campaign as part-and-parcel of stated U.S. foreign policy intended to destabilize Cuba.

2. What are the “Independent Libraries”?

The “independent libraries” are private book collections in peoples’ homes. Mr. Kent and the right-wing Cuban-American propaganda outlets, call them “independent libraries” and even “public libraries.” These “independent libraries” are one of a number of “projects” initiated and supported by a virtual entity calling itself “Cubanet” (www.cubanet.org) and by an expatriate anti-Castro political entity calling itself the Directorio Revolucionario Democratico Cubano. The Cubanet website describes what the “independent libraries” are, how they got started and who funds and solicits for them. The index page says that the organization exists to “assist [Cuba’s] independent sector develop [sic] a civil society...” This is the wording used in both the Torricelli and the Helms Burton Acts, both of which require that the U.S. government finance efforts to subvert the Cuban society in the name of strengthening “civil society.” You will see on the “Who We Are” page that Cubanet, located in Hialeah, Florida, is financially supported by the National Endowment for Democracy, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and “private” “anonymous” donors. The “exterior” representative of the “independent libraries” is the Directorio Revolucionario Democratico Cubano, also located in Miami.5

3. Who are the “Independent Librarians”?

You will read on the pages of Cubanet about the individual “libraries” and their personnel. Not one of the people listed is actually a librarian. Not one has ever been a librarian. Most, however, are leaders or officers of various dissident political parties, such as the Partido Cubano de Renovacion Ortodoxa and the Partido Solidaridad Democratica. This is documented on Cubanet, although Mr. Kent never mentions these party affiliations in his FCL press releases. We know absolutely nothing about the principles, programs or activities of these parties, or why they have been allegedly targeted. We don’t know whether their activities are lawful or unlawful under Cuban law. Kent maintains that their activities are solely related to their books — but in reality we have no idea whether this is true and in fact, one of these “librarians” told one of our ALA colleagues that this was not true! By using the terms “beleaguered,” “librarians” and the buzzwords “freedom of expression” and “colleagues” Mr. Kent hopes to get the a priori support of librarians who might not look beneath this veneer. After all, isn’t this the reason that the subcommittee will be considering their case in the first place? But I wonder if ALA is willing to establish the precedent that all politicians with private book collections who decide to call themselves “librarians,” are therefore our “colleagues”?

4. Who funds Cubanet, the Directorio, and the “Independent Libraries” — and why is this important?

A recent book entitled Psy-War Against Cuba by Jon Elliston (Ocean Press, 1999), reveals, using declassified U.S. government documents, the history of a small piece of the 40-year-old propaganda war waged by our country against the government of Cuba. The U.S. has spent hundreds of millions of taxpayers’ dollars over these years to subvert and overthrow the current Cuban government — U.S. activities have included complete economic embargo, assassinations and assassination attempts, sabotage, bombings, invasions, and “psyops.” When even the fall of the Soviet Union and the devastation of the Cuban economy in the early 1990’s did not produce the desired effect, the U.S. embarked on additional, subtler, campaigns to overthrow the Cuban government from within. One element of this approach is the funneling of monetary support to dissident groups wherever they can be found, or created. This includes bringing cash into the country through couriers such as Mr. Kent, and increasing support to expatriate groups operating inside the U.S., such as the Directorio, Cubanet and especially, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF).

The website Afrocubaweb (www.afrocubaweb.org) has gathered information from the Miami Herald and other sources to document the recipients of
this U.S. funding. USAID, a U.S. government agency, supported the Directorio Revolucionario Democratico Cubano to the amount of $554,835 during 1999. This is the group that supports the “independent librarians” in Cuba and is listed as their “foreign representative.” The money that they send to Cuba, as well as the “small amounts” of cash that Mr. Kent carried illegally to Cuba violates Cuban law, which does not allow foreign funding of their political process. Neither does the United States allow foreign funding of its own political process — the furor around alleged Chinese “contributions” to the Democratic Party is a case in point. The “independent libraries” may be independent of their own government, but they are not independent of the U.S. government. The U.S. government is not the only anti-Castro entity that has adjusted its policy to changing times — the most right-wing forces in the Cuban expatriate community have also stepped up their support of dissident elements inside Cuba over the last few years. The Miami Herald reported in September 2000 that “the leading institution of this city’s exile community plans to quadruple the amount of money it sends to dissident leaders on the island...” This leading institution is the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), and the article reports that part of the group’s $10,000,000 budget will begin “flowing to the island through sympathetic dissidents by the end of the year.” More specifically, CANF will, among other declared activities, “increase funds to buy books for its [Cuba’s] independent libraries.”

5. What is CANF? What is its record on free expression, intellectual freedom, and democratic rights here in the USA?

The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) was founded by Jorge Mas Canosa, a veteran of the Bay of Pigs invasion and CIA operative, at the behest of the Reagan administration in 1982. It has become the most wealthy and powerful voice of the right-wing Cuban community in south Florida and has wielded extraordinary political power for the last twenty years. It has been connected to violence and terrorism both in Cuba and in Miami. Its newest tactic, as described above, is to “support” dissidents in Cuba, including buying books for “independent” libraries, presumably to support “freedom of expression” in Cuba.

Mr. Kent and Mr. Sanguinetti claim to be proponents of human rights and frequently refer to the “landmark” IFLA “report.” But they seem to have no problem with their libraries’ CANF connection, even though CANF was the subject of a truly “landmark” report issued by Americas Watch, a division of Human Rights Watch, in 1992. The Americas Watch report on CANF is the first that organization ever issued against a human rights violator in a city of the United States. It states that “a ‘repressive climate for freedom of expression’ had been created by anti-Castro Cuban-American leaders in which violence and intimidation had been used to quiet exiles who favor a softening of policies toward Cuba.” The executive director of Americas Watch at that time, said “We do not know of any other community in the United States with this level of intimidation and lack of freedom to dissent.” The report documents “how Miami Cubans who are opposed to the Cuban government harass political opponents with bombings, vandalism, betings and death threats.” A campaign spearheaded by CANF against the Miami Herald in the early nineties resulted in bombings of Herald newspaper boxes and death threats to staff. Pressure from CANF closed the Cuban Museum of Arts and Culture because it showed work by artists who had not “broken” with Cuba. Anyone who followed the Elian Gonzalez case this past year noted that tolerance for dissenting views by Cuban Americans was completely lacking in Florida and a hostile atmosphere was maintained by CANF during the duration of the affair. Can you imagine what the life expectancy of a pro-Castro “independent library” in the middle of Little Havana would be, given this history?

CANF does not respect freedom of expression or democratic rights in the USA, yet it is a direct financial supporter of Mr. Kent’s independent libraries. Neither Mr. Kent nor Mr. Sanguinetti have disowned this support — in fact they haven’t even mentioned it! They have not chosen to examine or criticize the lack of free expression among the very people that give them succor and publicity here at home, yet they claim to be its great champions in Cuba!

6. What about free expression and democratic rights in Cuba?

There is no doubt that political dissidence has its consequences in Cuba. Those who want to overthrow the current socialist government are considered political problems. Because of the declared and well-funded U.S. policy of seeking to destabilize Cuba by creating and/or instigating social unrest, the Cuban people consider these people to be agents of U.S. policy and enemies of the nation. This view is shared by the former head of the U.S. Interests Section in Cuba, former Ambassador Wayne Smith who says:

Since 1985, we have stated publicly that we will encourage and openly finance dissident and human rights groups in Cuba; this too is in our interest. The United States isn’t financing all those groups...
Cuba does not have a perfect human rights record. But are we simply to condemn Cuba for this situation? Don’t we, as U.S. citizens, whose tax dollars have been used for so many years to create this situation, have a special responsibility to look at the full picture? Shouldn’t our first concern be to change the policy that has directly contributed to the limitation of democratic rights in Cuba? Even the UN special rapporteur for human rights, while critical of Cuba, credited the U.S. policy for making the situation worse than it might otherwise be.15

Mssrs. Kent and Sanguinetty are asking this committee and the ALA for a sweeping condemnation of Cuba on the basis of human rights. But are not food, education, medical care, income, freedom from violence, and literacy “human rights”? The Cuban people enjoy free medical care — despite the U.S. denial of Cuba’s right to purchase basic medical products — and have one of the highest per capita rates of doctors in the world. All Cuban children attend school and enjoy free education through university. The Cuban people are an extraordinarily literate people with many more libraries and books than people in most of the undeveloped world, despite Mr. Kent’s attempts to ridicule their library collections with absurd claims that have been refuted by Cuban librarians. Cuban workers have the right to an income even if they have been laid off from work; they have a society free from violence and no Cuban child has ever been killed by a gun in his/her school. Racism, as we know it in the U.S., is not present there and vestiges of racism are actively combated at all levels of society. If these are taken as measures of human rights, Cuba comes out looking very good indeed. This is not to say that intellectual freedom and complete freedom of expression are not important. But Cuba’s exceptional success in fulfilling these basic human needs explains why the majority of the Cuban people are not anxious to trade their current situation for the “free market,” “wealthy exiles get their property back” plans of Kent/Sanguinetty’s sponsors in Miami and the U.S. government.

Before the ALA passes judgment on Cuba, even in the area of free expression, we need to look at the whole picture and we need to have some first-hand experience. We cannot simply act on what one ill-informed librarian and a professional expatriate propagandist — both with U.S. government backing — tell us.

7. How does U.S. policy towards Cuba affect free expression and intellectual freedom for U.S. citizens?

For close to forty years, in various permutations, the U.S. has maintained a travel ban, which specifically denies the right of U.S. citizens to visit Cuba outside a small set of “legal” and “licensed” exceptions. This means that if any U.S. citizen (any U.S. librarian, for instance) wants to travel to Cuba, simply to see for her/himself what is going on there (not for any specifically academic or professional purpose), this is against U.S. law and punishable by fines and/or imprisonment. If members of this subcommittee want to visit Cuban libraries, simply to chat with your counterparts and even seek out the “independent librarians” — it is not the Cuban government that is preventing you, it is the U.S. government! This is clearly an issue of intellectual freedom16 — but not to Mssrs. Kent and Sanguinetty. They are purists. They are only concerned about freedom of expression and intellectual freedom in Cuba — not in the U.S. — and for Cubans in Cuba, not in Miami! This is utter hypocrisy. Because of this fortyyear war against Cuba by the United States, it is not just Cuban citizens who have seen their
democratic rights limited, it is U.S. citizens as well. To deliberately ignore this reality reveals the claims and motives of Mr. Kent and Mr. Sanguinetty as deeply suspect.

8. What about the IFLA Report?

Why has the FCL been able to go forward with their accusations? The answer is a report by the recently formed IFLA-FAIFE (Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression) Committee. The sole basis for this action — the first such action taken by this committee — was the Friends of Cuban Libraries allegations, and several phone conversations with the alleged librarians involved. No member of FAIFE ever visited these “libraries” or attempted to. No “investigation” whatsoever was undertaken beyond these phone contacts. Parts of the report were taken verbatim from the papers of Mr. Kent and Mr. Sanguinetty. Even the FAIFE report acknowledges the role of financing by “foreign interests,” but it does not seem to find this point very important. It does not address the issue of who these “librarians” really are, but accepts FCL’s allegations that they are librarians. The IFLA investigation meets no standards. Nevertheless, it has bestowed on Mr. Kent’s cause a certain legitimacy and has allowed Kent to go to the Canadian Library Association, and other groups, which also reacted to the IFLA report and did no independent investigation. In an especially crass but clever move, Kent even managed to get a recently imprisoned Chinese American librarian to make statements about a situation about which he has no knowledge.

Perhaps IFLA can be forgiven for not understanding the nature of U.S. hostility toward Cuba, and the lengths to which the U.S. and the right-wing Cuban expatriate elements will go to further their aims of overthrowing the Cuban government. But the American Library Association will have no such excuse. Our own members and colleagues have visited Cuban libraries and the “independent” libraries (without prior notification) and have testified as to their inauthenticity. They must be listened to. This is already more than IFLA cared to do. The IFLA report, and all that followed because of it, cannot be allowed to grant any further imprimatur to the Kent/Sanguinetty campaign.

9. What about our real colleagues — the librarians of Cuba?

The charges that have been spread by Kent and his FCL have deeply offended our real colleagues, the librarians of Cuba, and our sister library association, ASCUBI. Our real colleagues are beleaguered by shortages of things as simple as paper, professional literature, computers and printers — and much of this has to do with their inability, because of the U.S. blockade, to purchase any items from U.S. companies (or foreign companies doing business with the U.S.). Computers cannot be brought to Cuba from the U.S. legally, even as a donation by licensed travelers. True “friends of Cuban libraries” would be concerned about these matters.

It is time that we begin to know our real counterparts/colleagues in Cuba. It is time that we begin to have the kinds of conversations and exchanges on all subjects — including intellectual freedom and censorship. It is U.S. policy, not Cuban policy, which prevents us from doing so. As the representative of U.S. librarians, the ALA has an obligation first to address our own country’s limitation of freedom of expression and the freedom to travel, then to criticize others. The American Library Association cannot allow itself to be the willing instrument of a U.S. government/CANF-sponsored disinformation campaign.

If the ALA takes any action at all on Cuba, it should be to call for an end to the embargo and the hostile U.S. policy towards Cuba which harms the democratic rights, including freedom of expression, of both the Cuban and U.S. people. ALA should begin in the spirit of the resolution passed by the U.S. librarians who attended the IFLA conference in Havana in August 1994 [see Progressive Librarian, no.9, Spring 1995, p.38].

FOOTNOTES

1. See http://internet.ggu.edu/university_library/il/cuba.html. Most of the activities carried out by the FCL take place on the listserves, of which this site has an "anthology."
4. Ibid.
5. Another of its stated purposes is "informs the world about Cuba's reality", but their news pages simply report only anti-government events or incidents.
8. Ibid.
12. Calvo & Declercq, pp 156, (interview with Ambassador Smith.)
15. Franklin, p 330.
16. In "The Right to Travel: The Effect of Travel Restrictions on Scientific Collaboration Between American and Cuban Scientists," the American Association for the Advancement of Science is every bit as critical of the United States in limiting travel as it is of Cuba! The report notes that the US government does not recognize the right to travel as an internationally recognized fundamental right. http://shr.aaas.org/rtt/report/one.htm.

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Resolution Concerning Cuba adopted at IFLA
Council II held at Boston, USA on Friday, 24th August 2001

The following resolution was adopted. 553 votes in favor, 54 against, 12 abstentions.

Be it resolved that IFLA:

1 State its strongly felt concerns about the effects of the US embargo that include
   — Obstacles to the export of information materials to Cuba despite their formal exclusion from the embargo
   — A severe reduction in the capacity of Cuban libraries and citizens to purchase information materials and related technologies due to the economic effects of the embargo
   — Indirect disruption of access to information by Cubans and Cuban libraries caused by the effects on power supply, telecommunications and other aspects of life in Cuba
   — Inhibitions to professional interaction and exchange caused by the restrictions on travel to the US by Cuban nationals and to Cuba by US nationals.
2 Urge the US Government to eliminate obstacles to access to information and professional interaction imposed by its embargo and any other US Government policies.
3 Urge the Cuban Government to eliminate obstacles to access to information imposed by its policies.
4 Support and continue to monitor initiatives by the Cuban library community to safeguard free access to print and electronic information, including via the Internet, in particular:
   — Support and assist the ASCUBI [Asociación Cubana de Bibliotecarios] initiative to develop a code of ethics for the standards and principles of library services in Cuba
   — Urge the Cuban library community to adopt fully the IFLA Public Library Guidelines [The Public Library Service: IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for Development. Saur: 2001]
5 Encourage IFLA colleagues to attend the international conference on information in Havana 22-26 April 2002 hosted by IDICT [Instituto de Informacion Cientifica y Tecnológica] to help further professional relations with Cuba.

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As a Latin American area specialist, I have had a long-standing interest in Cuban libraries. I have visited Cuba several times since 1989, and each time I met with librarians and toured libraries. During these visits, I learned more about libraries, including the history and development of library collections and services, the training and education of library professionals, the professional development of the librarian and information technologist (or the “informatico”), the community-based programming and outreach of the libraries, and the user studies that are done in Cuban libraries. The last two years (2000 and 2001), I organized trips to Cuba for groups of librarians and we visited all types of libraries: the national library, public and school libraries, university libraries, the graduate school of library science and a library training school. Many times the Cubans expressed their appreciation for our visit and asked us to convey their friendship and greetings to the U.S. librarians whom we might know. They wanted to learn about U.S. librarianship experiences and practice.

Our librarian hosts treated us cordially. They willingly shared their experiences as well as their challenges. There was never a situation in which I felt the Cubans did not want to answer questions, to describe their problems, to pose criticisms and complaints about things, or to discuss critical issues affecting the profession — or, for that matter, to discuss the relations between our two countries that also affect the profession. I’ll talk more about that later.

We had both organized and spontaneous, informal meetings and exchanges about services and collections and the Internet and technological innovation. They asked us about our collection development budgets and philosophies, about ALA and about our professional ethics. They told us about projects they organized to support literacy, to promote the love of reading and to bring the community into the library. In other words, our conversations revolved around issues of interest to library professionals from any...
part of the world. Several times we talked about intellectual freedom and their techniques for building their collections during times of limited budgets. It was obvious that many of their problems resulted from underdevelopment, scarce resources, limited growth, and a precarious economic situation that is typical throughout Latin America.

Visits to Libraries (Services)

On my trips to Cuba, I observed a range of achievements of the library profession as well as a range of problems caused by scarce resources and economic limitations. On the positive side, these limitations have compelled library professionals to be creative, patient, vigilant and resourceful. On the other hand, Cuban libraries face chronic shortages of basic resources — such as office supplies, paper, computers, and budgets for acquisitions and technology. They experience regular problems with the telephone system and international communications, which make library development difficult. Yet, librarians have found solutions to technological as well as other problems, and they have progressed toward their goals of collection building and improved services. For example, they continue to add materials to their collections through exchanges, donations, and by developing new partnerships in Cuba and throughout the world.

Cuban librarians place public service and outreach high on their priorities and they have accomplished a great deal by combining creative writing and publishing programs. They also have embraced culture and the arts as paths to reaching children and youth, parents, working people, individuals with special needs, isolated rural communities, students, the aged, and the sick.

Examples of these programs are:

For children, the public libraries host “game” days and contests about historical figures, the arts and culture, and have developed story times, theater presentations, and art and music appreciation days. For parents, librarians teach classes on integrating reading into family activities and have established “bebeteacas” (books for pre-schoolers). They also take books to the workplace or establish reading rooms to circulate books to employees. For the elderly and housebound, they deliver books to their homes on regular visits. In one library closed for repairs, the librarians traveled throughout neighborhoods to meet patrons, give classes, talk in schools about library services, and continue outreach activities. These librarians were without a building for over 6 months, but were never idle.

Another innovative program established by several libraries was a “subscription borrower group” where patrons contribute books and/or pay a small sum to borrow new books. The cost of subscribing is 10 pesos per year — a peso is worth about 5 cents, so about $.50/year. To put this amount in context, I want to mention a few things — a Cuban librarian makes about 300 pesos per month (actually Cuban doctors make the same amount). These “subscription borrower groups” are called Minerva Clubs and they invite patron support and donations to public library popular fiction collections, and are one way in which Cuban libraries have responded to the increased need for new books when publishing declined dramatically in the early 1990s. These clubs, started with donations of materials from Spain, serve large numbers of people and help the library buy multiple copies of high-demand titles. Another point for context — Cuba’s literacy rate is about 98%. Cuba is a nation of readers. Everyone in Cuba owns books, lots of books, and often these books are loaned to friends or re-sold. Their books can also be used to subscribe to this popular fiction club.

Cubans Study their Users

On my most recent trip to Cuba, several in our group participated in the conference “From Papyrus to the Virtual Library” sponsored by the Casa de las Americas. There, we had the opportunity to learn about several studies done by Cuban librarians to assist them in designing and delivering services to library users in their communities. Most of these studies were prepared by Cuban librarian-researchers (investigadores), whose position responsibilities include conducting research and needs assessments on a particular library’s constituencies in order to design improvements in or develop new programs or services. Several librarians presented research that they had completed in the course of their work or had conducted to address a specific need.

It was very interesting to see, through these presentations, what the Cuban librarians sought to change or improve. The topics studied by Cuban librarians revealed an intense interest in preserving the historical record, such as the documents and publications of the various archives, libraries and research centers. They were also interested in intellectual property rights, distance education, marketing of cultural products (i.e. books, websites, etc.), the role of the librarian in a digital world, and the library as promoter of culture in the community and among special populations. It was refreshing to learn about the Cubans’ use of technologies to offer
services to such diverse populations as scientists, teachers, athletes and physical education faculty, workers and administrators of a sugar refinery, environmental specialists, individuals with disabilities and, finally, in the training of library school students. An especially interesting new project involved developing library collections to serve a targeted neighborhood or section of town, after doing an extensive needs assessment.

Their Collections

As I mentioned earlier, Cuban librarians have used a variety of strategies to build their library collections because of their limited budgets. Exchanges (canje) and donations are used extensively to build the collections — because library budgets are so limited. In fact, most U.S. research libraries with Latin American collections have long-standing exchange relations with dozens of Cuban libraries and research institutes. Over 40 years, these relations have resulted in hundreds if not thousands of titles exchanged between Cuban and U.S. libraries. Another way Cuban libraries build collections is through the “deposito legal” (legal deposit) program, which requires all publishers in Cuba to give 5 copies of each title they publish to the National Library. The National Library adds a copy to their collection, sends some copies to other libraries, and uses some copies for exchange with its extensive list of international partners. And, just a plug here, the exchange list of the National Library is on their website (http://www.lib.cult.cu).

The National Library is another place we visited. Founded in 1901 and celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, it has a sizeable collection (over 3 million items), and serves as the country’s main repository for Cuban intellectual patrimony. The Library also provides a full array of services to the public including circulation, reference and children’s services. It also serves as the lead organizer of a network of 387 public libraries in the country. Several librarians at the National Library are in charge of providing training, cataloging and reference tools, program and planning support, continuing education, and technological support to public libraries as well as to about 600 school libraries, 500 health centers, and 1000 information centers in Havana.

At the National Library, we talked about collection building strategies and found that we have a lot in common. We strive to build collections that the reading public wants and that serve to stimulate minds, and to offer various perspectives on cultural and national development and national policy matters. I was heartened to learn of their interest in all types of materials, especially Cuban authors that are published outside of Cuba. This is not new — every time I have been to Cuba I have received the same request — to help them find books about Cuba and by Cuban authors, wherever they may be published in the world.

Now, I’d like to talk about the Internet in Cuba. The Internet, as might be expected, was of intense interest among librarians. During visits, our Cuban hosts asked many questions about how we meet the demands of patrons and how new technologies, especially the Internet, have transformed our profession. We shared our experiences about the impact of technology on our work, and this led to several lively discussions about the impact of change on library services in general and on the rising expectations and desires of library patrons for electronic materials while we must continue to offer traditional products and services. In Cuba at this time, developing professional expertise on computers and the Internet is a top priority for most staff. To accomplish this, they organize workshops, courses, and seminars to teach about computers and information technology.

Cuba already has quite a commitment to web development. Libraries and research centers have an impressive web presence, with nicely designed sites, unique databases and active, energetic developers that are eager to digitize and offer many unique Cuba holdings. At the March conference organized by Casa de las Americas, we saw demonstrations of several new electronic products produced in Cuba. One of them, CubaLiteraria, is dedicated to Cuban literature (http://www.cubaliteraria.com). Billed as “the portal to Cuban literature,” its content and developing database of authors make this an important resource for studying Cuban literary production and publishing. Another website that brings together many Cuban resources is the Portal for Philosophy (http://www.filosofia.cu). And, the Casa de las Americas, has begun digitizing the first 40 years of its important literary journal (Revista Casa de las Americas) with wide-ranging coverage of Latin American literature, criticism, and the arts.

At our visit to the Institute for Scientific and Technological Information (IDICT), we met with a team of web developers and library technology coordinators and they told us about their initiatives in support of business development and commercial enterprises in Cuba. They offer their services to Cuban as well as foreign businesses. However, there are still some obstacles to Internet access in Cuba, such as telecommunications and equipment. But, there is also great interest in and expectation that the
Internet will be more available in Cuba soon. This is a priority of the National Library right now and they plan to implement it in the nation’s public libraries once some of the obstacles are overcome. There is no doubt that the Internet is on its way to every corner of Cuba.

Now I’d like to switch to talking about the two library associations that exist in Cuba — the Association of Cuban Librarians (ASCUBI) and the Cuban Society of Information Sciences (SOCICT). We met with both groups and learned of their organizations and their goals, their activities related to professional training, and their ways of keeping current (actualizarse). ALA officials who traveled to Cuba in May also met with these two groups.

ASCUBI, the Association of Cuban Librarians, has about 1200 members and represents librarians, library workers and library technicians. There are chapters in nine of the 14 provinces. The decision-making body, the Executive Council, meets regularly and one of their agenda items is to facilitate development of relations with sister librarian associations. Cuban librarians pay about one peso per month for dues to ASCUBI (about 60 cents per year). And, they are interested in developing a professional relationship with ALA as well as with individual librarians from around the world. They are currently discussing how they might participate in the ALA Sister Library Initiatives. Their next conference will be in November and they extend an invitation to U.S. librarians to attend.

SOCICT, the Society of Cuban Information Professionals and Technologists, also met with us. They have about 800 members with chapters in all 14 provinces. They regularly host (since 1988) an international forum on technology. During our meeting with the leadership of this association, they asked us to convey a special invitation to U.S. librarians and to members of the American Library Association to an upcoming conference they are organizing. This conference, “Information, Knowledge and Society: Challenges of a New Era” or INFO2002, will be an important forum for dialogue between librarians from Cuba and the U.S., and will be held April 22-26, 2002 in Havana. Over 500 librarians are expected to attend from Latin America, the U.S. and Canada. The SOCICT colleagues emphasize that this conference will be an excellent opportunity to exchange experiences, best practices, philosophy and values. In fact, the leadership of ALA has received an official invitation to this conference (this will be reported at tomorrow’s meeting of the International Relations Committee of ALA — Tues. June 19, 2-4 pm, Moscone Convention Center, Rm. 110). I am convinced this conference is an opportunity to create lasting professional relationships and partnerships with our Cuban counterparts, so I am organizing a delegation to attend. Actually, we are working to accommodate several delegations from the US and Canada. If you’ve ever wanted to check out Cuba for yourself, or if you want to be a part of this important dialogue, please let me know and I will sign you up.

In Conclusion

What I’ve concluded from these visits is that Cuban libraries are an important component of Cuban society and serve thousands of people on a daily basis. Librarians in Cuba are eager to provide materials of all kinds to their users who are very well educated about Cuba and about the world and who read a lot. Cuba librarians look for and deposit in their collection materials with different viewpoints, including materials that are critical of the revolution, materials written by Cubans living abroad, and materials on human rights, such as the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The development of libraries in Cuba has been hampered by the economic and political isolation of the country, a movement led by the U.S. with its singular support for, and now Congressionally mandated, economic blockade of the island. This 40-year blockade has made it difficult for libraries to develop, as well as for people to survive with proper nourishment, medicine, and supplies. To combat their poverty and isolation, Cuban librarians have worked with many professional associations, international agencies and universities all over the world in order to acquire books and materials for their libraries. Their primary manner of doing this is through gifts and exchange. One of the main messages we received from librarians in Cuba is that the librarians would appreciate donations of materials and supplies to help them continue to build their collections. The librarians also seek to establish relations with U.S. librarians and professional associations when such relations are based on honesty, mutual respect and professional support.

Independent Libraries

I would have liked to have ended this presentation here. But, I want to address the “independent libraries” issue and describe what I found out about them while in Cuba. I leave the “independent libraries” for last because they are really a small group of people in Cuba who are not representative of Cuban librarianship and who do not deserve mention as part of the history of Cuban librarianship.
Many of you have probably read the information on the “independent libraries” that has circulated widely on ALA listservs, where Robert Kent (speaking for the Friends of Cuban Libraries) claims that these libraries exist despite repression and harassment by the government, that they are bastions of intellectual freedom, and that they deserve the support of librarians throughout the world.

However, based on my research and on my visits to those libraries, I found that these Kent press releases do not provide the whole story of these libraries. Today, in order to fill in the gaps left by Mr. Kent’s spin, I will describe what Larry Oberg and I found out when we visited many of these libraries and interviewed their owners, their neighbors and their leaders.

Using the contact information provided by the “independent libraries” website, Cubanet.org, we visited over one dozen libraries, many located in the Havana area. We reviewed their collections, interviewed their owners and asked them questions about their purpose and motivation, their circulation, outreach, about how they build and finance their collections, about their foreign and domestic leadership, and about their political alliances and goals for the future of Cuba.

We found that the “independent libraries” in Cuba have collections ranging from a few dozen to a few hundred books in private homes. The titles are similar to collections that are displayed in most Cubans’ homes (politics, economics, social history, the arts, medicine, etc.). In several homes, I asked which books have been banned by the government. The answer they gave was “none.” I asked if the books or their library activities had drawn the attention of any governmental, police or security forces; the answer was no. I asked if they had books that Cuban libraries did not have. Some said they didn’t know; others said yes and showed us Cubanet.org newsletters and webpage printoffs, a book by Vaclav Havel, an issue of Newsweek, a book on the theory of democracy, and publications written and donated by the Cuban American National Foundation (an anti-Castro organization in Miami). We were told that the libraries receive regular deliveries of these materials and some monies from contacts in Miami and Mexico. The families also said that they have worked against the Cuban government for years. They told us that they received regular deliveries of materials by personnel from the U.S. Interests Section. And, they mentioned that these materials, especially, were very useful in their efforts to oppose the Cuban government.

In Santiago, we visited one library because we had in our possession an e-mail from Robert Kent that claimed that the founder of this library and its director since 1998, had been harassed and jailed and that the books had been confiscated.

But, what I found was a different story. I asked if the owner had been arrested or if the books had been confiscated. The answer was no. I asked if the government had ever interfered with the library, or taken any books, or harassed her or the owner. She said no. When I asked her where the “owner” of the library was, she said he had left Cuba in 1994 (six years earlier) and currently lived in Miami where he continued to work in opposition to the Cuban government. This information contradicted Mr. Kent’s press release about the government harassment and imprisonment of the owner and the confiscation of his books. By visiting his “library,” we found out that this “owner”— contrary to Mr. Kent’s press release — had not established this “library,” that he had not been an “independent librarian”, that he had never participated in loaning any materials, that he had not been harassed by the government, and he had not had his the books confiscated by the government. In other words, our interview with this “independent librarian” proved Mr. Kent’s email to be false in every detail.

At other homes of these “libraries,” I asked where they had obtained the materials that were not Cuban publications. Some of them showed me packages (indeed still in the packing paper) of materials they said were dropped off by the U.S. Interests Section or were from Miami or Mexico. Again, the materials that I saw that were sent from outside of Cuba were: Cubanet.org website printoffs, Cubanet.org newsletters, website printoffs with the label from the U.S. Interests Section, and the Cuban American National Foundation publications.

**Our Conclusions**

These “libraries” appear to us to be a public face for a dissident movement within Cuba that has its leadership, financial support and media operations outside the country. The individuals who operate these “libraries” are neither independent, nor are they librarians. They depend upon donations from sources that oppose the Cuban government and, therefore, cannot be considered independent of interests outside of Cuba.

But the supporters of these “libraries” face an interesting dilemma: The fact that these so-called “independent libraries” exist proves that there is some
kind of intellectual freedom in Cuba. They apparently have the freedom to dissent, freedom of assembly, freedom to read materials that criticize the government as well as materials that seek to overthrow the government. They are free to accept money (or "payment for services" as one "librarian" put it) from sources outside the country and free to tell their neighbors as well as foreign visitors and the foreign media about their collections, their services, their purpose, their desires to topple the Cuban government, and their connections to and payments by a hostile foreign government.

The existence of these libraries seems to provide evidence to the contrary of what they claim in their communiques and statements to the press. They do continue to operate; they do continue to report on Radio Marti and Radio Mambi; they do continue to speak to foreign press and to foreign visiting librarians, and they do continue to be well-paid for services rendered. Enough said.

So, now that we know who is who in Cuba and what the real librarians in Cuba are doing vs what the "independent librarians" in Cuba are doing, I would like to pose a question to U.S. librarians — how can we make sure we are learning about what is really happening in Cuban libraries?

My answer is this: we can reach out to Cuban librarians, we can ask Cuban librarians how to be their friends, we can visit Cuba and begin to collaborate with them, we can send materials and books of all kinds for their collections but primarily the books that they say they need to educate their children and their students — not just books for a few dissident "librarians" connected to Miami (who seem to be well-taken care of by our government, for that matter).

More of us need to travel to Cuba to see what is really going on there with libraries. And, we need to realize what the U.S. travel restrictions to Cuba mean. Frankly, I believe we are more restricted on travel than the Cubans are and, at the least, our intellectual freedom is being compromised by the governmental restrictions on our travel, trade and the free flow of information. We need to turn our support toward erasing the barriers that our government has put up and work to end the blockade of travel, information, exchanges and real knowledge about our Cuban colleagues, so that none of our rights are inhibited and none of our freedoms are restricted.

And, finally: Based on our very detailed discussions in Cuba, the real librarians in Cuba know who their friends are. Friends are individuals that respect each other, that do not seek to destroy or mislead, and that base their relationships on honesty, integrity and the values of our profession. I invite U.S. librarians to continue to care about and help Cuban libraries. One way to help is to send donations of materials and supplies. Another way is to spread the word about the accomplishments as well as the real challenges of librarianship in Cuba! And, you can help by visiting Cuba. Join the delegation to Cuba next April for the INFO2002 conference, or go on your own! Your travel to Cuba is an investment in your own intellectual freedom.

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Casa de Las Americas (http://www.cult.cu/casa/indice.html). Library Director, Ernesto Sierra. becasas@cult.cu

Instituto de Informacion Cientifica y Tecnologica (Capitolio de la Habana). http://www.idict.cu.

CubaLiteraria, is dedicated to Cuban literature (http://www.cubaliteraria.com) and billed as a "the portal to Cuban literature," its content and developing database of authors make this an important resource for studying Cuban literary production and publishing.

Portal for Philosophy (http://www.filosofia.cu).

ASCUBI Association of Cuban Librarianship (ASCUBI): President, Marta Terry maternity@hotmail.com.

SOCICT, the Society of Cuban Information Professionals and Technologists. (http://www.idict.cu/socict.html).

The INFO2002 conference site is at http://www.congreso-info.cu/. For more details, on the conference in Havana (April 22-26, 2002), contact the conference organizer: Lic. Nicolas Garriga Mendez, President of the Organizing Committee, Apdo. 2019, La Habana 10200, Cuba. FAX (537) 338237; Tel (537) 635500; info@idict.cu. For travel arrangements to this conference, contact Marazul Tours (bguild@marazultours.com). To participate in the US delegation, contact Rhonda Neugebauer (rhonda.neugebauer@usc.edu), University of California, Riverside, 909/787-3703.

"Cuba on the Internet," http://www.cuba.cu/cubainternetes.html, Contains one of the most comprehensive lists of Cuban Internet sites with links to specialized portals, media outlets, government sites, libraries, and universities.


NOTE: The above was presented as a paper for the program "Cuban Libraries: Challenges and Achievements" for the American Library Association Social Responsibilities Round Table, International Responsibilities Task Force, June 17, 2001 (WESTIN Elizabethan D, 4:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m.)
MEMO TO:
Committee on Professional Ethics, ALA

by Larry R. Oberg

To: Charles Harmon, chair, and members of the ALA Committee on Professional Ethics.

From: Larry R. Oberg, University Librarian, Willamette Univ., Salem OR
Date: April 10, 2000
Re: Robert Kent and Friends of Cuban Libraries.

Dear Charles and Committee members:

On Monday, 3 April 2000, I returned from a two-week research trip to Cuba. The trip was organized and conducted by Rhonda Neugebauer of Wichita State and included some fourteen other librarians from around the country. During our stay, we visited many libraries and spoke with countless librarians and support staff. Our stay included visits to the Biblioteca National “Jose Marti”; the Biblioteca Provincial “Ruben Martinez Villena” in Havana; the Biblioteca Publica “Elvira Cape” in Santiago de Cuba; the Biblioteca Central “Ruben Martinez Villena” of the University of Havana; and public libraries in Matanzas, Cardinas and Varadero. We also visited the Instituto de Historia de Cuba; the Archivo General de la Isla de Cuba; the Escuela Nacional de Tecnicos de Bibliotecas in Havana; several elementary and secondary school libraries; and the Latin America literary incubator and publishing house, Casa de las Americas.

In Santiago de Cuba, a few of our group also visited two of what Mr. Robert Kent of the Friends of Cuban Libraries calls “independent” libraries. We spoke at length with the people who are responsible for these “libraries.” Please allow me to summarize a few of the conclusions I have reached about Cuban libraries in general and about the “independent” libraries that Mr. Kent has championed in innumerable postings on innumerable library listservs. Please understand that these are my personal conclusions and are not intended to represent the perceptions of other members of the group.

1. CUBAN LIBRARIES

— The materials budgets of Cuban libraries are dramatically underfunded. But, libraries are not alone in this regard. The financial crisis that this island nation has undergone since the collapse of the Soviet bloc (something the Cubans refer to as the “special period”) has had a severe impact on book publishing, industry, construction and many other areas of the economy, including of course, living standards.

— The Cuban librarians that I met were, with a few exceptions, highly professional, talented and capable. They are committed to professional excellence and are clearly abreast of current trends in North American and European librarianship.

— The Jose Marti National Library and the major provincial and city libraries are busily preparing for automation. The National Library’s systems staff has developed a plan for a national union catalog and network that only awaits funding for implementation. A nationwide science and research network is also being created by the National Institute of Science and Technology (Havana), which we also visited.

— Most of the libraries that we visited have clear collection development policies and standards. The national library collects materials on all topics and does not limit its collections to materials that support the ideology of the Cuban government. They actively solicit, for example, copies of materials published by dissident Cuban authors who reside abroad. At the same time, they do not necessarily add all of the vehemently anti-Fidel materials published by dissident Cubans who reside in Miami, just as North American libraries do not actively seek out and buy all of the anti-gay and lesbian tracts published in Colorado Springs and other centers of right-wing Christian publishing.

— Cuban librarians take their outreach obligations seriously and have invested heavily in bookmobiles and branch libraries in isolated rural locations. They are particularly committed to making library services available to rural Cuban children.

— School libraries are ubiquitous in Cuba. Almost all elementary and secondary schools have libraries and librarians. (We might compare this to the situation in the United States.) We spoke at length with a group of second graders in a Matanzas elementary school who asked bright and
intelligent questions of us. They were reading José Martí’s *The Red Slippers*.

**THE “INDEPENDENT” CUBAN LIBRARIES**

Some of our group visited two “independent” libraries. Both of these were listed, with addresses, in one of Robert Kent’s numerous postings on library listservs. The following bulleted items represent my personal understanding of what we found:

- The first “independent” library we visited was in Santiago de Cuba. It was located in a private home and consisted of two bookcases filled with books, one in the living room, another in a back bedroom. I would estimate that this collection might have included 200 volumes. The woman who tended the collection spoke freely and openly with us about herself and her “library.” She insisted that the main objective of the library was to make materials available to children, but could produce no children’s books. Many of the books in the “collection” were published in Cuba, although perhaps the bulk were published in the United States, Mexico, Spain and other countries. She showed us a copy of a single issue of the Cuban periodical *Educación* as an example of how she wishes to make books available to students. She told us that she was considering removing the back cover of the issue, however, because it includes a quote from Fidel Castro. She told us that most of her relatives live in Miami and that she regularly records and broadcasts statements on Radio Marti and Radio Mambi, both of which beam anti-Cuban government programming to Cuba from the United States.

- The second “independent” library that we visited was also in Santiago de Cuba. This “library” had no books or materials at all. The family that lived in the apartment said that they had distributed all of the materials they had had to sympathetic individuals in preparation for leaving for Miami. They recently received exit visas from the U.S. government and expect to depart Cuba in May. They explained that they had never collected books per se, but rather had relied upon deliveries of pamphlets, reprints of articles and other materials that came directly from the U.S. Interest Section in Havana. These materials, they noted, were hand-delivered by Americans who came to their home in automobiles. They considered that these materials were better than books because they not only supported their political beliefs but also could be used to enlighten others about North American democracy. They agreed that these materials were useful in their efforts to bring others to their anti-government position and to recruit others to the anti-Castro movement.

**MY CONCLUSIONS:**

- Marta Terry, the president of the Cuban Library Association, and other Cuban librarians pointed out to us that they have tried many times to contact and work with these “librarians.” The independent “librarians” with whom we spoke, however, have never approached the established libraries because they vaguely feel that they would be rebuffed.

- Mr. Kent continually insists that the “independent librarians” of Cuba are our peers and colleagues. In neither of the two cases that I cite above do the principals have degrees or training in librarianship, nor do they even appear to be what we might call “book-oriented” people. They are not librarians by any definition that we would understand.

- Neither of the two “independent” libraries that I visited are marked or signed in any way as libraries. One had no collection whatsoever and the other had a modest collection of materials of a size that one might expect to find in any Cuban home. The one collection that I saw was not cataloged or even organized by subject. There was no circulation apparatus and this collection had no materials to support its stated collecting goal, children’s literature.

- The independent “librarians” that I met are all self-professed political dissidents, and appear dedicated to the overthrow of the Cuban government. (They spoke with us openly and apparently without fear of reprisal about their anti-government activities.) They are closely allied with the U.S. government, the U.S. Interest Section in Cuba and with Cuban dissidents in Miami and Mexico. Several had been arrested by the Cuban authorities, but they emphasized that these arrests had nothing to do with their “independent” library activities. The arrests, in all cases, were for subversive and clandestine activities carried out to undermine the Cuban government. It is my distinct impression that these libraries are, on the one hand, a public face and a recruiting tool for a dissident movement within Cuba and, on the other, a means of “jumping the queue” to get an immigration visa to the United States.
MR. ROBERT KENT

Upon my return I found that I had received a copy of a letter, dated 15 March, from Mr. Robert Kent addressed to you and the members of the ALA Committee on Professional Ethics. In his letter, Mr. Kent presents censorship of Cuban library collections and suppression of the "independent" libraries as an established fact. With this firmly established, he anticipates duplicity on the part of Ms. Neugebauer and, by extension, those who accompanied her. He cites the stated objective of the group, "to hold discussions between U. S. and Cuban librarians on key aspects of librarianship such as philosophy, values, ethics and professional practices," as evidence that she "apparently has no intention of supporting intellectual freedom during the library program she will be conducting in Cuba." He concludes by suggesting that her activities in this area "may be subject to an inquiry by the ALA Committee on Professional Ethics."

I accompanied Ms. Neugebauer on all of the visits that the group made in Cuba and I wish to make the following comments:

— In all encounters with Cuban librarians, and indeed with Cuban citizens, Ms. Neugebauer and the other members of the group conducted themselves at the highest professional level; a level that does honor to our profession and the American Library Association.

— In all of our meetings with Cuban librarians, Ms. Neugebauer and other members of the group asked penetrating questions about government interference in collection development, the independence of Cuban librarians, and other questions that probed their philosophy, values, ethics and professional practices.

— I know that Ms. Neugebauer and the other members of our research group are deeply committed to intellectual freedom and oppose censorship in all its forms.

It is, therefore, deeply disturbing to me to be accused, in advance of the fact, of dissimulation and derelection of professional standards. For myself, I believe that many of you know that my name, my publications, and my professional activities have always strongly supported intellectual freedom and the autonomy of librarians in the development of their collections. My record in this area will withstand the deepest scrutiny.

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It seems to me that Mr. Kent's charges against Ms. Neugebauer should be dismissed forthwith. His activities and his charges against Cuban librarians are unproven and, certainly, conflict with what I found in long and probing conversations with these very librarians. Mr. Kent's rhetoric is inflamed and his charges reflect more accurately his politics than they do the practice of Cuban librarians.

Finally, I want to state that I know Ms. Neugebauer to be a honorable and principled librarian, someone who is committed not only to high professional standards but is also dedicated to the truth wherever it may lead. Mr. Kent's charges are outrageous and unfounded and I request that you and the members of the committee dismiss them out-of-hand.

6. Urge the US Government to put policies in place to make sharing of books and other materials on all subjects as well as information technology with Cuba's libraries easier for all who wish to improve access to information in Cuba through strengthening library collections.

7. Urge the US Government to share information materials widely in Cuba, especially with Cuba's libraries, and not just with "individuals and independent non-governmental organizations" that represent US political interests.

This resolution was a homologated version of two resolutions on the same subject. The first resolution was proposed by Alex Byrne, Chair of the IFLA Committee on Free Access to Information and freedom of Expression (FAIFE) and seconded by Glenys Willars, Chair, IFLA Section on School Libraries and Resource Centres. The second resolution was proposed by John W. Berry, President of the American Library Association (ALA) and seconded by Eliades Acosta, Director of the Biblioteca Nacional José Marti, Cuba. The homologated resolution was proposed by Bernard Margolis, President of the Boston Public Library, USA and seconded by James G. Neal, outgoing Dean of University Libraries, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA.

Ross Shimmon
Secretary General, IFLA, The Hague
3 September 2001
BOOK REVIEWS

A Radical Democratic Critique of Capitalist Education, by Richard A. Brosio (New York: P. Lang, 1994.)

Reviewed by Dr. Michael Carbone

The current expansion of the private vision into all aspects of American life is unprecedented as many scholars have been noting for some time. In fact Henry Giroux has proclaimed it the “new public philosophy.” The triumph of the market has been heralded by conservative thinkers and offered up as the solution for many of our most pressing socio/political problems. It was Milton Friedman who first suggested its application to public education and now we are seeing a continued rise in various voucher/charter approaches to provide much needed “improvement” in our nation’s schools. The continued popularity and growth in for-profit companies to run charter schools, schools placed on state distressed lists, and voucher schemes of one sort or another might suggest we are on the verge of privatizing our public school system. Within the current framework of accountability and high stakes testing in our public schools, some might not blame parents for their support of privatization schemes, particularly parents of traditionally underserved populations. As Diane Ravitch reminds us these kids are “somebody’s children.” However, one would be hard pressed to argue that any form of privatization/choice will seriously address much-needed educational reforms for any population of students. In fact, close scrutiny of burgeoning “for profit” companies to manage schools reveals a disturbing story. Steven Wilson’s Advantage Corporation is a case in point. Corporate officers have little-to-no education background and the for-profit schools they set up are run according to the strictest rules of efficiency and cost effectiveness. The pedagogy is limited, routinized and scripted, and some teachers are even recruited from the ranks of retail sales.

This is the educational climate we currently find ourselves in – one on the cusp of the triumph of the private vision and the advent of a “public school industry.” How are we to respond to all of this? Aside from the host of “usual” questions one can ask of any privatization plan, the most pressing one has to do with the future of our common democratic lives, and the larger social issues of equity and justice. What is lost in this final hammer blow to public education? Richard Bosio’s book, A Radical Democratic Critique of Capitalist Education helps us to think meaningfully about these issues. In this rather lengthy but authoritative and thorough argument, Brosio discusses the consequences of growing corporate culture and ideology and its ability to colonize almost every aspect of our daily lives and (quite literally) our schools, presenting itself to us as a complete common sense world view. It is this inexorable triumph of the private vision over public values that “rots the pillars of democracy” as Brosio notes. One of the strengths of his text is its scope, integration and reflection of his years of scholarship regarding this acute problem in American democracy, and it is clearly a central problem if our democratic future is to be even minimally preserved.

The text offers a sophisticated analysis of the rise of late capitalist corporate power and just how it has politically managed to saturate our everyday collective lives and our public institutions. His work chronicles in detail the arguments surrounding the triumph of the Conservative Right since the 1970’s. We are left with the idea that corporate power has worked mightily to shape the culture and climate of public schools — and now one might argue even do away with them. What is less certain for Brosio (although not intended) is a clear notion of how schools and those who are in them can regain a level of cultural autonomy to begin effective resistance and critique. But resist we must. If, as Ira Shor has noted, critique and re-imagery are the beginnings of politics then Brosio’s text is a must read for all of us who believe that our common lives matter: human decency and dignity are found in commitments to democracy, social justice and a rich public life.

It is not an easy task to understand how the ideologies and forces of late capitalism have served to inform and structure so much of our cultural life. It is a complex and incomplete process, but it is perhaps the strongest aspect of Brosio’s work. His chapter on “The Consequences of the Capitalist Imperative on Everyday Life” is skillfully organized around his observation that, “our formal society and lived cultures can be described as being most powerfully influenced by two imperatives: capitalism and democracy.” It is the constant dialectical relationship of these two factors which defines much of American politics and consequently the role and shape of major social institutions like our schools. Brosio’s critique of Postmodernism, the “cultural skin of late capitalism” as he names it, is particularly useful and noteworthy as well. He rightly observes that the postmodernist stance of pessimistic ironic detachment concerning the ability to understand things inhibits the construction of liberatory praxis or politics. He flatly states, “many postmodernist thinkers are part of the problem, rather than the solution.” His text is one of the few on the left that actually suggests that
postmodern analysis (beyond their commitment to the politics of inclusion) and frameworks will not yield the sort of vigorous commitment one needs for the reclamation of democratic socio-economic practices.

Lest we think that Brosio leaves us with no hope, his work is a powerful balance between critique and what Henry Giroux has called the language of possibility. Each chapter either explicitly or implicitly suggests through its critical analysis or framework possible democratic ways to act in the face of corporate capitalist ideologies. He is very sensitive to the kind of mass-movement formations needed to advance the democratic imperative. As such he is sensitive to the contributions of the liberatory politics of identity and their relationship to the issues of the larger public sphere. These are delicate negotiations to be sure! This book takes on a big project. The tough intellectual work needed to pierce the current cultural/economic status quo, and the beginnings of building a more democratic vocabulary and framework, are the stuff of Brosio's life work. The text is not a particularly easy read, but for the most part he puts complex ideas into very intelligible language. I would suggest that, in these times of strong private visions and interests, those of us who seek more democratic roles for schools or libraries must read this book. It is comprehensive, well argued, scholarly and — above all — passionate.


Reviewed by Jenna Freedman

Toni Samek's is an important book that should be required reading in library school, and even as a refresher course for any librarian who needs to remember what librarianship is all about. As Sanford Berman writes in the book's foreword, "[Samek's] thoughtful, detailed study can well provide a basis for better understanding where — as a profession — we have been, and where we're going." The witty and pointed foreword, incidentally, is well-worth reading as a stand-alone essay.

The prevailing themes in this history of the activist movement in American (primarily United States) librarianship are "professional neutrality" vs. professional and personal social responsibility; access to alternative literature, as provided by libraries, librarians, and non-library radical groups; and American Library Association (ALA) service to libraries vs. to librarians, especially regarding intellectual freedom. The above and other themes introduced by Berman's foreword, some explored more than others in the body of Samek's text, lay out the same damned issues facing librarians today. These include [public] libraries' typical service population, which tends to be the middle class, as evidenced by the preponderance of business materials; the commercialization of libraries and of ALA, where rooms and programs are routinely named after the vendors that sponsor them; intellectual freedom's narrow focus on individual materials challenges; and collection development that enhances the hype created by publishers.

Samek's introduction sketches the history of social responsibility in librarianship prior to the years indicated in the book's title. She gives special attention to the 1930s, the "first verse" of progressive librarianship. Quoted is Jesse Shera, who says of 30s and 60s library activism, "the actors are different, but the script is much the same." Samek cites the 1939 Library Bill of Rights, "which directed librarians to 'fairly represent' materials on 'all sides of questions on which differences of opinion exist' and 'to oppose censorship of books and other reading matter' because of the 'race or nationality or the political or religious views of the writers.'" She also provides the social context of the political climate in the sixties. Unfortunately, the introductory chapter gives away too much of the developments chronicled in later chapters and thereby muddies a timeline that is already difficult to record. It is obvious from the thoroughness of the research and
the voluminous bibliography, that this work was originally written as a doctoral dissertation, yet it is tremendously readable. The only time the work’s academic bent is a problem is in the somewhat formulaic introduction. However, this same formula is helpful in its revelation of Samek’s research methodology, including a short list of materials examined: *Activism in American Librarianship, 1962-1973* by Mary Lee Bundy and Frederick J. Stielow (Greenwood Press, 1987), ALA’S SRRT Papers, the Sanford Berman Papers, the Radical Research Center Papers, unpublished manuscripts, archival papers, published primary and secondary literature, ALA conference proceedings, and interviews and correspondence with participants.

Chapter 1, “The 1960s and the Alternative Press” supplies more history and context, which is again a bit unnecessary. Baby Boomers don’t need to be told, Generation Xers are sick of being told, and Generation Y doesn’t know, but doesn’t care. What is more helpful is the account of the development of the sixties alternative press movement, which was established in large part by non-librarians. It was, in fact, Sylvia Price, a member of the Radical Research Center (RRC), an organization that produced the first alternative to the *Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature*, who was among the first to identify Library of Congress Subject Headings as inadequate for the materials in their index. Librarian Sanford Berman then stated that librarians should be using their professional skills to create a more professional and accessible tool. Some librarians, like Berman and Jackie Eubanks (to whose memory this volume is dedicated), were ashamed that the *Alternative Press Index* did not originate within the profession, but others did not approve of the index at all — perhaps because they, too, were jealous that the achievement had not come from them.

The second chapter, “The Ethos of Intellectual Freedom” further chronicles the history of the theme, in this case of intellectual freedom, along with a sprinkling of a more general activism. Samek introduces feminist issues in librarianship — a profession dominated by women in numbers and by men in terms of leadership. The history presented in this chapter is more useful, perhaps because it is less a part of the reader’s experience. She explores how the government became overtly involved in identifying some materials as “subversive” and others as “patriotic” during World War II and how the roots of the Cold War gave rise to a greater governmental awareness of the power of mass media to influence public opinion. It was in this chapter that I began to be concerned that the book’s primary focus is public libraries. This, however, may be more a function of the movement and its leaders than of any lacuna in Samek’s reporting. Also in her defense, this section cites school librarians’ entry into the public discourse on censorship with their stance on the NYC public schools’ ban on *The Nation* due to its less than favorable references to the Catholic Church.

Other issues developed are of professional neutrality and the orientation of ALA toward libraries, rather than to librarians; how librarians neglect alternative selection tools in order to cut down on the paperwork created by using multiple sources for acquisitions; and on the fact that library activists are politicized on the job, not in library school.

The book really starts to get meaty with Chapter 3, “Calling for Change, 1967-1969.” Topics addressed earlier get fleshed out in a way that is inspirational for the reader. It begins with late 60s librarians’ premise that “the library should become an active agent for social change and the concept of intellectual freedom should incorporate the premise of social responsibility.” Publisher domination of collection development and its obvious bias toward mainstream literature coupled with librarians’ hesitancy to get involved in the debate is investigated, along with the sluggishness of the women’s liberation movement as it was felt in this intensely female profession. It was also in this era that librarians began agitating for legal, financial, and professional support for their defense of intellectual freedom and Library Bill of Rights struggles. They further called for the support of the profession by beginning to discuss how to agitate from within ALA. So began what is today called the Social Responsibilities Rund Table (of the American Library Association). As in *All the President’s Men* the list of names included is long and sometimes hard to follow if you didn’t live the era. It is heartening to read the account of SRRT’s development, and to see that many of the prime players of the 1960s and ‘70s movements (E.J. Josey, Patricia Glass Schuman and others) are still active leaders. However, in those days the membership support was a lot greater, with 100 people attending SRRT’s first meeting at the 1968 Annual Conference in Kansas City. Agenda items for this meeting included “more accountability from ALA elected officials, the needs of the public at large, the association’s operational structure, details of recruitment, and intellectual freedom.” Sound familiar?

In 1969 the ALA Council approved the formation of SRRT (I’m using the current acronym, SRRT, for consistency’s sake, although the early group was known as the Round Table on Social Responsibility in Librarianship, RTSRL). Other important elements of this chapter are the development of
other activist organizations in the profession, such as: the Congress for Change (CFC); Librarians for 321.8; and ACONDA, the Activities Committee for New Directions for ALA (a group of 6 SRRT members, and 7 others, including a chair, appointed by the ALA Executive Board). Also presented here are the cases of individual librarians (Joan H. Bodger and T. Ellis Hodgin) caught in intellectual freedom disputes. Samek relates how at one early SRRT program 800 members were in the audience and 500 more were turned away at the door — less familiar to today’s reader, but still very exciting. After seeing so many SRRT resolutions defeated by council in recent years, I was pleased to learn that it was a successful SRRT proposal that ALA election candidates make platform statements and that election results be counted and publicized. By the end of 1969, SRRT was the largest ALA Round Table with 1,013 members.

A big year in progressive librarianship is chronicled in “Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility, 1970.” More social and political context is provided, but here it is more intrinsically connected to the events of the chapter. For instance, the ALA Annual Conference was held in Chicago at the same time as a certain infamous trial of eight, then seven political activists. Librarians, too, faced police intervention (Samek’s word) at a program featuring a film about police riots, which also included guerilla theater performances. Other 1970 developments cited are the founding of the Black Caucus, a group that chose not to be directly associated with ALA, so that it could retain its independence. Now the idea that intellectual freedom complemented, rather than opposed, social responsibility was also in vogue. However, a budget crisis and the perceived threat to ALA’s tax status resulting from political activities caused SRRT to come under increased scrutiny. Samek also reports ably in this chapter on the beginning of what would come to be known as the Berninghausen Debate. A lot of other great and fun achievements are revealed in this and the following chapter, “The Changing of the Guard, 1971-1972” and in the epilogue, “Reaffirming Professional ‘Neutrality,’ 1973-1974,” but I have to resist giving it all away. Suffice it to say highlights include Detroit conference attendees sporting “F*ck Censorship” (asterisk not mine) badges, E.J. Josey leading 100 librarians in a walk-out from a membership meeting, a well-publicized “hug-a-homosexual” booth at a subsequent conference, and Jackie Eubanks calling for SRRT to rename itself “ALA Provisional Revolutionary Government.”

The issues and questions raised by Samek in her account of ’30s and ’60s progressive librarianship are still very much alive in the 21st century. I fear that the third verse of this song will not be different from the first, although at this point it is sung with less gusto. With this comprehensive and rousing work, Samek has charged today’s librarians with continuing to fight the good fight. The only criticism I would make is that, as I said earlier, the bias is tipped toward public libraries and that although Samek is presumably a Canadian (her bio places her in Alberta and as a member of the Canadian Library Association), the emphasis is on activity in the United States. Like ALA, her work is misnamed, a more accurate title for the former being the United States Library Association.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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Rhonda Neugebauer is Latin American Studies/Humanities and Social Sciences Bibliographer at the University of California, Riverside. She has organized several trips to Cuba to acquire books for U.S. libraries and to research Cuban libraries. Her visits, with Larry Oberg, to so-called independent libraries in 2000, uncovered the U.S. government direct financing of dissident “librarians” and “journalists” in Cuba and their donated “collections” of anti-Castro materials hand-picked and delivered by the U.S. Interests Section. She is publisher of a review column of web resources, “E-resources for Latin American Studies” http://home.earthlink.net/~rhondaneu/eresources/eresources1.html. She invites PL readers to join her on future trips to Cuba.

Larry Oberg is currently University Librarian at Willamette University, Salem, Oregon. Before that, he worked at Albion College, Albion, Michigan as College Librarian, and before moving to small college libraries, he worked at UC-Berkeley and Stanford. Over the past two years, he has spent over 3 months in Cuba on three separate trips, and published several articles on both Cuban libraries and the status of gays and lesbians in Cuba. He has also published widely over the years on the role, status, and working conditions of paraprofessionals in libraries.

Mark Rosenzweig is the Director (librarian/archivist) of the Reference Center for Marxist Studies in NYC. He is an ALA Councilor-at-large and an at-large member of the Action Council of ALA’s Social Responsibilities Round Table. His most recent article, on principles of international progressive librarianship, has appeared in the South African library journal, Innovations.

Ann Sparanese is the Head of Adult & Young Adult Services at the Englewood (NJ) Public Library, where she manages a busy reference department. She has a longstanding interest in Cuba, where she first traveled in 1972. She attended the 1994 IFLA Havana conference, and organized the 2001 SRRT program on Cuba at the ALA Annual Conference in San Francisco.

Marta Terry has been a professional librarian since 1953 and has practiced her librarianship in such important settings as the Cuban Central Planning Committee in the early sixties, Havana’s Casa de las Americas (as director, 1967-1987), the José Martí National Library (director, 1987-1997), and as first vice president of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). Dr. Terry is currently president of the Cuban Librarians Association and director of the Ark of Paper library at the Cuban Book Institute. She has her PhD from the University of Havana.
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Tammy Wofsey is a librarian at Marymount Manhattan College. She is an artist and a printmaker. Her latest artist book is called “Pest.” It is a book about the life and death of the common house fly.