

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 100<sup>th</sup> 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*

**Editor's Note:** *The following statement was inadvertently left out of the last issue of Progressive Librarian introducing Sanford Berman's article "Inside Censorship." This paper represents an expanded, revised and updated version of work Mr. Berman has previously delivered or published in a variety of forms, among them: "Inside Censorship," delivered at Simmons College, sponsored by the Library and Information Science Student's Association and Simmons GSLIS Alumni Association, April 12, 2000. "Talking the Talk and Walking the Walk: What Librarians Say They Do But Frequently Don't," delivered at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Library and Information Science, April 17, 1997. Reprinted in the New York Library Association Intellectual Freedom Round Table Newsletter, Fall 1997. "Three Kinds of Censorship that Librarians (Mostly) Don't Talk About," Minnesota Library Association Newsletter, Vol. 23 No. 7, August/September 1996. "Inside Censorship," Wisconsin Library Bulletin, Spring 1981. John Buschman*

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

**by Stuart Hamilton**

**I**n 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 24<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> 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<sup>1</sup>. 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.<sup>2</sup>

### *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 literate<sup>3</sup>.

The school system is also unrivalled in the Caribbean, with 98% of the population having received at least an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education<sup>4</sup>. This is a result of a high educational budget that lends itself to the highest index of teachers per capita in the world<sup>5</sup>. 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 capita<sup>6</sup>. 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 people<sup>7</sup> — 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 construction<sup>8</sup>.

At the top of the Cuban library system is the National Library, the Bib-

lioteca Nacional Jose 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 room<sup>9</sup>. 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 services<sup>10</sup>.

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 it<sup>11</sup>. 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 library<sup>12</sup>.

### *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<sup>13</sup>. 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<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup>.

#### *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)<sup>16</sup>. 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.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>. 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<sup>19</sup>. 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<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup>.

#### *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<sup>22</sup>.

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 Democrático 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<sup>23</sup>.

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 Reflexión de la Oposición 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> Enterprising 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.<sup>26</sup>

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."<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

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 Aenas 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<sup>29</sup>. 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.<sup>30</sup>

### *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."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>. 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<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup>. 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."<sup>35</sup>

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."<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup>. 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<sup>40</sup>. 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<sup>41</sup>.

### *The U.S. Embargo*

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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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.<sup>42</sup> Travel restrictions mean that Cubans cannot travel to the U.S. to exchange information and undertake professional development, and U.S. 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 U.S. government. Donations of books from the U.S., meanwhile, have to go through a third country — an unorthodox route that does nothing to improve information supply.<sup>43</sup> 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 U.S. and Israel voted to support it<sup>44</sup>) the U.S. 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.<sup>45</sup> In 1996 the U.S. 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 traveling to Cuba.<sup>46</sup> By far the most controversial piece of legislation in the act however, was the proviso that U.S. 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 U.S. was obliged to adhere to. Lawrence Eagleburger, a Democrat senator opposed to the act, called it "an imperial policy."<sup>47</sup>

The track of the Helms-Burton act that would allow U.S. 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 U.S. 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 made available to opposition and non-governmental groups to \$100 million over four years in cash, food, medicine, telecommunications equipment, office supplies and educational material.<sup>48</sup> 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 U.S.<sup>49</sup>

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."<sup>50</sup> Perhaps understandably this statement immediately began to inflame passions among librarians contributing to various message boards, such as the ALA Office for Intellectual

Freedom List<sup>51</sup>, 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.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup>

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*.<sup>54</sup> 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*.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, websites such as *Cubonet*<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup>

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.<sup>58</sup>

The founders of FCL are Robert Kent and Jorge Sanguinety. 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.<sup>59</sup>

Jorge Sanguinety'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."<sup>60</sup> Mr Sanguinety 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.<sup>61</sup> 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."<sup>62</sup> 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."<sup>63</sup>

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."<sup>64</sup> 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.<sup>65</sup> 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.<sup>66</sup>

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.<sup>67</sup> 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.<sup>68</sup> 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,<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup> Mark Rosenzweig, co-editor of the journal *Progressive Librarian* calls it a "U.S. propaganda outlet, pure and simple."<sup>71</sup>

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,<sup>72</sup> 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."<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup>

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."<sup>75</sup> 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<sup>76</sup>. 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."<sup>77</sup>

Certainly the NED does not hide its support of Cubanet and its aim of promoting an independent civil society in Cuba.<sup>78</sup> 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 acts<sup>79</sup>. 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.<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> 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.<sup>82</sup> 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.<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup>

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.<sup>85</sup> 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.<sup>86</sup> 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. It acknowledged the intensity of the debate and the possibility that the project, along with its supporters, might be funded by U.S. government affiliated agencies. With regards to the allegations made by the FCL, the report concluded that there were freedom of information issues at stake in Cuba and confirmed that arrests and harassment had taken place, along with confiscation of books. 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,"<sup>87</sup> although no names, places or dates are mentioned. Their 2001 report does not mention independent librarians.<sup>88</sup>

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*.<sup>89</sup> 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<sup>90</sup>. 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<sup>91</sup>. 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.<sup>92</sup> In the meantime, SILC are distributing 600-1000 books to the independent libraries in the coming year.<sup>93</sup>

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-

rary. They see the independent libraries as part of the democratic movement and therefore a political animal. Cecilia Malmstrom 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<sup>94</sup>. 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.<sup>95</sup> 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.<sup>96</sup>

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.<sup>97</sup> 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.<sup>98</sup> 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.<sup>99</sup> 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.<sup>100</sup>

##### 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."<sup>101</sup> 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.<sup>102</sup>

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.<sup>103</sup> 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.<sup>104</sup> 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."<sup>105</sup>

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.<sup>106</sup> 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 Torricelli 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 such as books, newspapers, magazines, films and sound recordings"<sup>107</sup> which is certainly a position at odds with opponents of FCL and commentators such as Afrocubaweb.<sup>108</sup>

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,<sup>109</sup> and queries the perspective of a man who denies the Khmer Rouge were responsible for atrocities in Cambodia.<sup>110</sup> 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.<sup>111</sup> 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*.<sup>112</sup>

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.<sup>113</sup> 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."<sup>114</sup>

While these words are open to interpretation and have been attacked by FCL,<sup>115</sup> 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 delivered 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 encouraging 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 independent of interests outside of Cuba."<sup>116</sup>

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 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 centres of right-wing Christian publishing."<sup>117</sup>

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.<sup>118</sup> There were no signs, collections were not catalogued, circulation of materials was not recorded and the librarians were not librarians at all.<sup>119</sup>

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.<sup>120</sup> 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 AS-CUBI. 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.<sup>121</sup>

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.<sup>122</sup> 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.<sup>123</sup>

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."<sup>124</sup> 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.<sup>125</sup> 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.<sup>126</sup>

Vidar visited the Biblioteca Independiente Dulce Maria 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."<sup>127</sup>

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 benefiting 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.<sup>128</sup> 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 31<sup>st</sup> 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.<sup>129</sup>

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 Loynaz 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 sign-posted 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 is 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 Shimmom, Secretary General of IFLA, produced a short report specifically dealing with the independent libraries that he visited during the week of ACURIL.<sup>130</sup> 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.<sup>131</sup> 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.<sup>132</sup> 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.<sup>133</sup> 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.<sup>134</sup> 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 rubbishes 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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<sup>105</sup> Dehmlow, R. (1999). Friends of Cuban Libraries. *Library Juice* [Online] Available: [www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol2/LJ\\_2.36.sup.html](http://www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol2/LJ_2.36.sup.html) [2001, January 16]

<sup>106</sup> Kent, R. (1999). Collected postings of FCL on the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom List [Online]. Available: [http://internet.ggu.edu/university\\_library/if/cuba.html](http://internet.ggu.edu/university_library/if/cuba.html) [2001, July 19]

<sup>107</sup> Ibid and Kent, R. (2000). Cuba's independent librarians: Defending intellectual freedom. *Impact: The Journal of the Career Development Group* [Online], 3, 8. Available: [www.careerdevelopmentgroup.org.uk/impact/0900/cuba.htm](http://www.careerdevelopmentgroup.org.uk/impact/0900/cuba.htm) [2001, January 16]

<sup>108</sup> Pateman, J. (1999). "Friends" versus supporters of Cuban libraries. *Information for Social*

*Change* [Online], 10. Available: [www.ibr.org/ISC/articles/10-cuba.htm](http://www.ibr.org/ISC/articles/10-cuba.htm) [2001, January 16] and AfroCubaweb. (2001). Dissidents [Online]. Available: <http://afrocubaweb.com/dissidents.htm> [2001, July 19]

<sup>109</sup> Kent, Robert (Rkent20551@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)

<sup>110</sup> 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). Benevolent Pot. *New Internationalist* [Online], 244. Available: [www.oneworld.org/ni/issue244/letters.htm](http://www.oneworld.org/ni/issue244/letters.htm) [2001, July 21]

<sup>111</sup> Rosenzweig, M. (1999). So-called "Friends of Cuban Libraries". *Library Juice* [Online], 2.36. Available: [www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol2/LJ\\_2.36.sup.html](http://www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol2/LJ_2.36.sup.html) [2001, January 16] and Pateman, J. (1999). "Friends" versus supporters of Cuban libraries. *Information for Social Change* [Online], 10. Available: [www.ibr.org/ISC/articles/10-cuba.htm](http://www.ibr.org/ISC/articles/10-cuba.htm) [2001, January 16]

<sup>112</sup> Rosenzweig, M. (2001). Kent's ALA campaign rebuked at conference. *Library Juice* [Online], 4.9. Available: [www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol4/LJ\\_4.9.sup.html](http://www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol4/LJ_4.9.sup.html) [2001, January 16]

<sup>113</sup> Neugebauer, R. (2000). Report on Cuban libraries, March 2000. *Library Juice* [Online], 3.34. Available: [www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol3/LJ\\_3.34.sup.html](http://www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol3/LJ_3.34.sup.html) [2001, July 18]

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Kent, Robert. (Rkent20551@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)

<sup>116</sup> Neugebauer, R. (2000). Report on Cuban libraries, March 2000. *Library Juice* [Online], 3.34. Available: [www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol3/LJ\\_3.34.sup.html](http://www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol3/LJ_3.34.sup.html) [2001, July 18]

<sup>117</sup> Oberg, L. (2000). Report on Cuban libraries, March 2000. *Library Juice* [Online], 3.34. Available: [www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol3/LJ\\_3.34.sup.html](http://www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol3/LJ_3.34.sup.html) [2001, July 18]

<sup>118</sup> 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>) are actually operating as independent libraries.

<sup>119</sup> Oberg, L. (2000). Report on Cuban libraries, March 2000. *Library Juice* [Online], 3.34. Available: [www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol3/LJ\\_3.34.sup.html](http://www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol3/LJ_3.34.sup.html) [2001, July 18]

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Sparanese, A. (2000). Comments on the Friends of Cuban Libraries. *IFLA Journal* [Online], 26 (1). Available: <http://www.ifla.org/V/ifaifaj/news26-01.pdf> [2001, July 18] and Sparanese, A. (1999). Cuba Supplement. *Library Juice* [Online], 2.36. Available: [www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol2/LJ\\_2.36.sup.html](http://www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol2/LJ_2.36.sup.html) [2001, January 16]

<sup>122</sup> Cubanet. (1999). Proyecto de Bibliotecas Independientes en Cuba [Online]. Available: <http://www.cubanet.org/bibliotecas/proyecto.htm>

<sup>123</sup> Sparanese, A. (2001). Paper for the IRC Latin American and Caribbean Subcommittee. *Library Juice* [Online], 4.9. Available: [www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol4/LJ\\_4.9.sup.html](http://www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol4/LJ_4.9.sup.html) [2001, January 16]

<sup>124</sup> Rosenzweig, M. (2001). Kent's ALA campaign rebuked at conference. *Library Juice*

[Online], 4.9. Available: [www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol4/LJ\\_4.9.sup.html](http://www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol4/LJ_4.9.sup.html) [2001, January 16]

<sup>125</sup> Vidar, D. (2001). 14 days in Cuba: A land of people living in between. *New Breed Librarian* [Online], April 2001. Available: [www.newbreedlibrarian.org/archives/01.02apr2001/feature.html](http://www.newbreedlibrarian.org/archives/01.02apr2001/feature.html)

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Pateman, J. (1999). Collected postings of FCL on the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom List [Online]. Available: [http://internet.ggu.edu/university\\_library/if/cuba.html](http://internet.ggu.edu/university_library/if/cuba.html) [2001, July 19]

<sup>129</sup> AfroCubaweb is of the opinion that dissidents tend to stand out much more in provincial areas and that activism similar to that practised by the Independent Libraries in Cuba project is much easier to undertake in Havana due to the size of the city. AfroCubaweb. (2001). Dissidents [Online]. Available: <http://afrocubaweb.com/dissidents.htm> [2001, July 19]

<sup>130</sup> Shimmon, R. 2001. *Report on a visit to Cuba, 23-30 May 2001*, (IFLA, The Hague)

<sup>131</sup> American Library Association. 2001. *Report of visit to ACURIL XXXI and its host country, Cuba, May 23 – May 30, 2001* [DRAFT] (ALA, Washington)

<sup>132</sup> Seidelin, S. 2001. *Libraries in Cuba: An IFLA/FAIFE report on free access to information in Cuba* [DRAFT] (IFLA, Copenhagen)

<sup>133</sup> Pateman, J. (2000). Libraries in Cuba : report of a visit to "independent", national and public libraries in Cuba, April 2000 [Online]. Available: <http://www.libr.org/CLSG/article15.html> [2001, Jul 20]

<sup>134</sup> Amnesty International. (2000). 2000 report on Cuba [Online]. Available: <http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/AMR250042000?OpenDocument&of=COUNTRIES\CUBA> [2001, July 18] ; Amnesty International. (2001). Amnesty's 2001 report on Cuba [Online]. Available: <http://web.amnesty.org/web/ar2001.nsf/webamrcountries/CUBA?OpenDocument> [2001, July 18] ; Human Rights Watch. [1999]. Cuba's repressive machinery: Summary and recommendations [Online]. Available: [www.hrw.org/reports/1999/cuba/Cuba996-01.htm](http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/cuba/Cuba996-01.htm) [2001, July 19] ; Pax Christi (2000). Pax Christi: Cuba Report [Online]. Available: <http://www.paxchristi.nl/cubareport.html> [2001, July 19]

<sup>134</sup> Amnesty International. (2000). 2000 report on Cuba [Online]. Available: <http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/AMR250042000?OpenDocument&of=COUNTRIES\CUBA> [2001, July 18] ; Amnesty International. (2001). Amnesty's 2001 report on Cuba [Online]. Available: <http://web.amnesty.org/web/ar2001.nsf/webamrcountries/CUBA?OpenDocument> [2001, July 18] ; Human Rights Watch. [1999]. Cuba's repressive machinery: Summary and recommendations [Online]. Available: [www.hrw.org/reports/1999/cuba/Cuba996-01.htm](http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/cuba/Cuba996-01.htm) [2001, July 19] ; Pax Christi (2000). Pax Christi: Cuba Report [Online]. Available: <http://www.paxchristi.nl/cubareport.html> [2001, July 19]

<sup>134</sup> Amnesty International. (2000). 2000 report on Cuba [Online]. Available: <http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/AMR250042000?OpenDocument&of=COUNTRIES\CUBA> [2001, July 18] ; Amnesty International. (2001). Amnesty's 2001 report on Cuba [Online]. Available: <http://web.amnesty.org/web/ar2001.nsf/webamrcountries/CUBA?OpenDocument> [2001, July 18] ; Human Rights Watch. [1999]. Cuba's repressive machinery: Summary and recommendations [Online]. Available: [www.hrw.org/reports/1999/cuba/Cuba996-01.htm](http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/cuba/Cuba996-01.htm) [2001, July 19] ; Pax Christi (2000). Pax Christi: Cuba Report [Online]. Available: <http://www.paxchristi.nl/cubareport.html> [2001, July 19]

## **“Why Do We Need to Keep This in Print? It’s on the Web...”: a Review of Electronic Archiving Issues and Problems**

**by Dorothy Warner**

**I**ndeed! 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.