

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

Newspaper Articles:

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

Kowalsky, Michelle. "People with Disabilities Face Information Access Issues." *Cognotes* July 1999: 12. A brief treatment of a population for whom a lack of technology frequently is the problem.

Lieberman, David. "Net Hangs Out of Reach of Have-Nots: Web Study Shows Educated, Affluent Widening Gap." *USA Today* 9 July 1999: 2B. This is an excellent and concise summary of the 1998 Digital Divide report, accompanied by *USA Today's* easily digestible graphics. For more complete information, see the official government web site below under "Online Sources."

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

Online Sources:

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

"Hobson's Choice: The Game You Can't Leave." *Realchangenews.org*: Puget Sound's Newspaper of the Poor and Homeless. 1 June 2000. <http://www.realchangenews.org/hobson_intro.html>. See the detailed description in the body of the article under the heading "Logistical and Financial Barriers: Virtually Homeless."

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

September 11th and PLG: an Editorial Exchange

by John Buschman and Mark Rosenzweig

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

The events of September 11, 2001, have undermined our sense of

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

Honorably defending the principles of the library profession (which is pretty much a Left position nowadays) is a big enough and hard enough job as it is. PLG is a minority, but a minority with rock-solid principles in such an instance. The AAUP's statement stuck closely to the founding principles of that organization, and what we post and publish as PLG should too. Look carefully at PLG's Purpose and Commitments statements on the web page or in the journal. It makes it clear that we are a library organization, whose purpose is to critique and situate libraries in their broader social and economic context, for the good that libraries do, and for the good of libraries and librarianship. We're not a bunch of people who have come together to oppose war or poverty or injustice — if so others have already beaten us to the punch. Our positions should be firmly grounded in our Purpose and Commitment statements in a real way. When they do not, we run into trouble in making distinctions between victims of oppression: we support Palestinians, but we don't have much to say about what happened in Vietnam after the North won. We fall into the reality Irving Howe described on the problems of having "positions" on every subject. PLG will be on firmer ground if we stuck to our stated reasons for founding PLG all the time.

For example, it is fashionable on the Left (following Chomsky) to link events like the bombing in Yugoslavia, Iraqi sanctions, South American death squads, and September 11 altogether into a common anti-American-business-and-military sensibility, and to top it off with being against injustice/war/violence generally. This is comforting, but historically dubious at best. The actors of September 11 were particulars, not generalities and it is not enough to just tally up all the injustices done in the name of American business and power, and then simply point to that. Historical causation is notoriously slippery, and it will be the same as regards September 11 when we know what can be known. I think Left commentary on September 11 is

too simplistic. Historically speaking, the standard to which we are holding American foreign and business policy is our own. As empires go, we are far from the most brutal, the most exploitive, the least just. We sometimes express astonishment that our democratic principles do not thoroughly inform the actions of our nation. I am not advocating a corrupt, Kissinger-like Realpolitik here, but I think that the Left, deploring and working against American shortcomings in our actions (overt and covert), is perhaps participating in something more fundamentally American than we realize. I think mindfulness of that connection and that perspective would do us good in making our case as PLG. We will not do justice to our ideas with simplistic reasons for the toll of September 11. Our moral reasoning has to make more fundamentally sound distinctions, while continuing to hold America to its stated values.

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

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

That is what Mark and I are doing through this editorial "debate." I fully agree with Mark's reasoning in his PLGnet posting "Why Librarians Must Debate War & Peace." The issues he raised go to the heart of the progressive agenda inherent in librarianship and the intellectual freedom responsi-

bilities PLG tries to uphold. It is the same reason I have written — and will continue to write — critically about the market environment which dominates the production and dissemination of information. These are broad (but I would argue, legitimate) professional concerns. Mark, Elaine and I wrote a reasoned defense of librarianship's involvement in social issues in the June 1994 *American Libraries*. We attacked the dramatic narrowing of "library" issues by ACRL & ALA and made a key point: "Clearly, not every social and political issue is a library one, but [we have as our] role precisely the raising of such issues so that their implications for the profession can be discussed, argued, and voted on." In other words, our social and political concerns are broad, but in the end they actually should relate to our field — and not just in the most tangential way. PLG can be a force in the field of librarianship if our positions are intellectually defensible and based on our founding principles.

John Buschman

Rosenzweig Responds:

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

What unites John and me and what brings us together, along with the other

editors of *Progressive Librarian* in common projects, is at the very least our shared feeling of the obligation to provide a forum which wouldn't otherwise exist for dissident, critical, alternative views of library issues and their context, from the left-liberal to the social anarchist, from the social-democratic to the neo-Marxist.

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

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

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

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

We wanted to help infuse librarianship, as it is practiced and as that practice is formulated and taught, with the explicit inclusion of social justice concerns, in particular the belief in the necessity of the expansion of

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the other hand, I have learned much from the late Irving Howe — a genuine member of the accepted and acceptable "left-wing" of the intellectual aristocracy — as a literary critic and as a chronicler of Jewish culture on New York City's Lower East Side in the earlier part of the last century.

Neither his being a literary critic nor Chomsky's being a linguist prevented either from being public intellectuals (although quite unequal participants) with reputations based on their politics. This is not a question of their expertise or qualifications to opine on what have come to increasingly be seen as specialized matters for experts, that is, all the elements of public policy.

Since we are discussing reactions to 9/11 and the measures taken following that, it is not inappropriate to point out that Howe's sense of Left politics, as a political figure of the "acceptable Left," publicly and vociferously supported every U.S. intervention and war in his adult lifetime. He was in favor of the Korean War, the Vietnam War (until very, very late in the game and then halfheartedly in opposition) and was, until his death, a virtually uncritical defender of U.S. policy supporting Israel, denouncing all criticism on the left as "anti-Semitic." He was in favor of all the U.S. interventions in Central America and the Caribbean. He was opposed to the '60s student movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the Black consciousness movement, the anti-intervention movements around Central America and the coalitions against U.S. support to the contras in Nicaragua. Yes, he was on the left of the Democratic Party as regarded some, perhaps most, domestic issues, but also was sometimes indistinguishable even there from his neo-Conservative friends on issues like affirmative action. He believed — not entirely baselessly — a "romantic 'Third Worldism'" and denigration of American democracy was the principle basis of the protest movements which pointed over and again to U.S. culpability for plowing much of the fertile soil for the development of things like the very terrorism we have now to confront. I would guess Howe would have decried my anti-war position and approved of bombing Afghanistan — and even moving on to Iraq perhaps — as legitimate State responses to a terrorist criminal conspiracy not of nations but of a fanatic cohort of a relatively small number individuals, speaking in the name of the entire Islamic world but clearly responsible only to themselves. Even with the rationalizations of a "democratic socialist" like the late Irving Howe in hand could I have done anything but issue the "cri de coeur" during the obvious run-up to war in my EMERGENCY DECLARATION FOR A HALT TO PREPARATIONS FOR BOMBING AFGHANISTAN: LIBRARIANS SPEAK OUT! (on the web at.....) which sparked this controversy among us leading to this editorial exchange, as I watched in horror not only the terror incidents but the preparations for the wholesale, intensive bombing of Afghanistan which was being openly planned as a collective punishment for 9/11 disingenuously presented as a search for justice, nor while a "war on terrorism" was

announced (if not officially declared) entailing immediate restrictions on U.S. civil liberties and suspension of constitutional rights here at home. My sense of professional responsibility made it imperative for me to speak out on my own behalf as a librarian, hopefully along with other librarians — right then and there — against what was coming down and asked others to join me. I did that as a concerned, committed professional and citizen, not as a representative of any organization or publication. I'm sorry if John or anybody else got any other impression. It was not my intention to stake out the position of PLG or the editorial board of PL and I regret if my personal action was confused as action in some official capacity. I thought I had made it clear in the original posting that it represented my view alone: unfortunately when reposted a note to that effect was excised as extraneous and that contributed to the confusion. It was subsequently revised so that its provenance was absolutely clear. PLG or PL may or may not have been able to come up with a statement on 9/11 and what followed, but I realized, as John points out, the mechanism for doing so was not even in place. I could not let that prevent me from speaking at least on my own behalf as a librarian and hoping to rally, as individuals, members of ALA, of SRRT, of PLG, if possible, also acting in their personal capacities.

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

Mark Rosenzweig