Although the joint delegation of Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG) and Radical Reference (RR) members at the first United States Social Forum was small, we certainly put librarians “on the map” at this important social movement gathering. The welcome message in the USSF’s Spanish/English program book read in part,

…Corporate globalization and repressive neo-liberal policies have left deep marks on our communities: increasing poverty; multiple oppressions rooted in class, race, nationality, gender, sexuality, ability, and age; environmental destruction; and increasing militarism. The USSF is an opportunity to explore the interconnections between these critical issues. It is an opportunity to come together to share lessons and questions, to learn from each other’s struggles. Finally, it is an opportunity to develop the bold collaborative visions, leadership, and strategies that we need to realize the call from our communities: Another world is possible! Another US is necessary!…Para que Otro Mundo es posible otro Estados Unidos es necesario. (United States Social Forum. p.3)

PLG’s participation was rooted in our longstanding commitments to the place librarians and libraries can play in social movements for human rights and justice, and to our opposition to the marketization of public institutions, neo-liberalism and corporate globalization as articulated in our Statement of Commitments (see Appendix A) and the “Ten Point Program,” the later developed at an international meeting of librarians in Vienna in 2000 (see Appendix B). Points in this program specifically connecting PLG’s commitments to the USSF’s are:

3. We insist upon the equality of access to and inclusiveness of information services, especially extending such services to the poor, marginalized and discriminated against, including the active solidarity-based provision of information assistance to these groups and their advocates in their struggles.

6. We will support cooperative collection, organization and preservation of the documents of people’s struggles and the making available of alternative materials representing a wide
range of progressive viewpoints often excluded as resources from the debates of our times.

10. We shall oppose corporate globalization which, despite its claims, reinforces existing social, economic, cultural inequalities, and insist on a democratic globalism and internationalism which respects and cultivates cultural plurality, which recognizes the sovereignty of peoples, which acknowledges the obligations of society to the individual and communities, and which prioritizes human values and needs over profits. (Appendix B contains the entire document in English and Spanish and can also be found at http://libr.org/plg/10-point.php.)

Radical Reference’s participation was rooted in their commitment in using their skills as librarians to serve activist communities “on location” and via the internet. For a report of Radical Reference’s activities at the USSF, see http://radicalreference.info/MRM/ussf2007.

Representing PLG were Kathleen de la Peña McCook and Elaine Harger, with Melissa Marrone representing RR, longtime PLG and RR member Dena Marger was able to attend at the last minute, and RR member Susie Husted arrived on Friday. We were joined by Mikael Böök of Finland who had participated with librarian colleagues Shiraz Durrani, Esther Ochabi and 70 others in preparing for and participating in the World Social Forum in Nairobi in January of this year (see “Libraries & Information in World Social Forum Context” at http://libr.org/isc/toc.html#24).

The PLG/RR delegation went to Atlanta with grand plans to (1) document the USSF by collecting materials distributed by organizational and individual participants, (2) survey attendees about the needs they have of libraries, (3) volunteer our skills as librarians at the Ida B. Wells Media Justice Center, and (4) learn about the social forum with an eye to determining how progressive/radical librarians might fit in as one element in this vast array of social movement activism and thought. This report offers a description of our activities and observations, reflections on our experience, and suggestions as to next steps for further engagement in the social forum.

Atlanta, June 27, 2007

...By gathering in this way, we are sending a message to peoples’ movements around the world that there is an active movement in the US that is committed to challenging US empire and its policies at home and abroad....

This excerpt, again from the USSF welcome message, fairly captures at the macro-level what PLG’s and RR’s presence did for librarianship in Atlanta – we sent a message to the poor, marginalized, discriminated against and oppressed that members of the library community are ready
to work shoulder-to-shoulder with our sisters and brothers in social movements locally, regionally and globally. Our presence, and the simple words “library” and “librarians” let every organization and individual who noted our participation know that members of the library world share their opposition to neo-liberalism, militarism and injustice.

In homage to the USSF’s statement on language accessibility, PLG’s new banner read “Library” on one side and “Biblioteca” on the other for the Opening March that launched the first ever regional social forum in the United States. The forum opened on June 27th and ended on July 1st, in Atlanta, Georgia.

Dena, Mikael and Elaine carried the banner in the march and, as usual, the presence of librarians caught the enthusiastic attention of other marchers – many photos, several PLG brochures handed out, and an abundance of words of gratitude, all under a scorchingly hot sun. After winding our way through downtown Atlanta for nearly two hours, our group left the march in order to meet our full delegation (plus Bill McCook, a Veterans for Peace activist and Kathleen’s wonderful husband) for a dinner meeting at Mary Mac’s Tea Room, which offered a most welcome air-conditioned calm and delicious Southern home-cooking for our hot, hungry and tired bodies. Much refreshed by our meal (including desserts of peach cobbler, strawberry shortcake, bread pudding and pecan pie!) we planned for our activities and Thursday morning program.

After dinner our group attended the Opening Ceremony at the Pine Street Stage to listen to speakers and relax. At one point both of us decided to try out our collection methods at the Solidarity Tents, of which there were 14 – Native American; Africa; Youth; Democracy; The People’s Freedom & Solidarity; Health, Healing & Environmental Justice; Nahr Al-Bared Palestine; Tent of the Americas: South-North; Peace & Justice; Dreams & Nightmares: a photo exhibit; Immigrant Rights; Solidarity Economy; Right to Water; and Poor People’s Economic Human Rights. We realized that attaching to each document a form containing archivally pertinent information was out of the question, and so decided to simply pencil directly on to each document a note about where the item was collected, the date, time, initials of person collecting, and when necessary the name of the organization producing the document.

June 28th A.M.

None of us was prepared for the size of the forum with thousands of participants, and hundreds of workshops (the program listings put ALA’s to shame, with nearly as many plenaries, cultural events, workshops and meetings – and zero advertising). Approximately 40 venues, including Atlanta’s Central Library and the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African-American Culture and History hosted social forum workshops, cultural events, and informal gatherings. While we knew our colleagues at the World Social Forum in Nairobi numbered 70 strong, we certainly did
not expect to need so many for this regional forum – but could have! Our collection and survey activities were tiny compared to what might have been possible had we had more people to help. At it was we collected maybe 1/2 a linear foot of documents which were sent to the Labadie Collection of Social Protest Literature at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor (see Appendix C for a sample list of documents Kathleen collected). Twenty-one surveys of the 100 copies we made were completed. To be noted, additionally, was another limiting element – not all of us were able to attend the entire forum, with Dena, Kathleen and Elaine all departing from Atlanta by the 29th.

Our program had been scheduled as we requested, at the very start of the forum in the first timeslot available for workshops, 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., and we were placed in the best of all possible venues – the Auburn Avenue Research Library, the second largest collection of African-American materials in the U.S., located on the very street that is home to the Ebenezer Baptist Church and the gravesites of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mrs. Coretta Scott King. After our meeting, library director Francine Henderson gave us all a very warm welcome, after which librarian and archivist Sherrie Robinson gave us a tour of the beautiful facility.

In addition to our PLG and RR delegates, our meeting Thursday morning was attended by two librarians and one future library school student (all of whom expressed excitement at discovering our program “Librarians and the USSF”); a young couple from Denmark who decided ours was the “most creative” (unique?) among the listings for that timeslot; and by a Pacifica radio producer who interviewed both of us for a program that aired the afternoon. A podcast should be available soon. We had a total of 11 people at our program, and the agenda included a report from Mikael of the WSF Library work in Nairobi; descriptions and discussion of our collection, reference and survey activities at the USSF; a report from Kathleen on librarians and the immigration issue; and, at the request of one of the attendees, a report of ALA activities.

Mikael opened with an appeal that librarians participate in the upcoming January 26, 2008 mobilization event taking place globally. He then described how the WSF started, in part, as a response to concern over growing attempts via the GATTS and TRIPS economic protocols to strengthen and extend intellectual property rights, and went on to tell how Kay Raseroka of Botswana summoned all librarians to participate in the social forum movement while president of IFLA, her call taken up by the librarians who participated in the WSF in Nairobi. Mikael then described the training sessions held with 70 librarians, which were conducted by himself, Esther Obachi (Secretary of the Kenya Library Association) and Shiraz Durrani (Senior Lecturer in Information Management in the Department of Applied Social Sciences at the London Metropolitan University). Part of the training sessions included a study of the WSF Charter of Principles (see http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=4_2&cd_language=2).
Mikael ended by describing a classification scheme for the WSF Library which is based on the 21 Actionable Items developed by the World Social Forum in 2006 as an organizing tool for the forum. The librarians revised the official classification scheme somewhat for purposes of the WSFLibrary project.

Due to time limitations, we were not able to have a full discussion of this classification system at our meeting in Atlanta, but the basic idea behind the list is that, like the Dewey Decimal and Library of Congress classification systems which organize knowledge into categories for purposes of access, the following headings (and any number of subheadings) could be used to catalog documentation from the social forums and represents a new way of looking at the organization of human knowledge – a classification system which seeks to acknowledge, explicitly, the material basis of human life and the social structure and struggle of human aspirations. See the following for the full discussion at the WSFLibrary website:
http://www.wsflibrary.org/index.php/Actionable_themes

1. Water;
2. Political institutions and democracy;
3. Peace and war;
4. Housing and human habitat;
5. Gender issues and women’s struggles;
6. Dignity, human being diversity, discriminations;
7. Human rights;
8. Youth;
9. Food sovereignty, peasants and land reform;
10. Labor and workers;
11. Education;
12. Environment and energy;
13. Health;
14. Knowledge, information and communication;
15. Taxation, debt and public finance;
16. Migrations;
17. Trade and transportation;
18. Culture;
19. Transnational Corporations;
20. Children;
21. Alternative economies;

Mikael closed his presentation by recommending the book *Information Feudalism: Who Owns the Knowledge Economy* by Peter Drahos and John Braithwaite and informing us that Esther Ochabi is preparing a manual to be used for documenting social forums, to which we who were in Atlanta might be able to contribute our experiences and insights.

Next, Elaine described our plans for collecting documentation of the USSF, and Melissa described the reference work at the Media Justice Center, which was organized by *POOR Magazine*. Of great interest regarding the
latter was the organizing principle that journalists should be collaborators in producing stories with the people who have direct experience of the matter under investigation. For example, a story on homelessness would be the product of collaboration between a person who has direct experience of being homeless and a journalist who has the skills to convey that person’s story via the media. The Ida B. Wells Media Justice Center was a space (in the bowels of the Atlanta Civic Center) where people with lived experience could find an expert journalist with whom to tell a story. Melissa, Susie and Elaine all volunteered some time at the center.

Because of our small numbers, we decided at the meeting that the most we could try to do in regard to collection materials was to select specific venues and to have each volunteer collect materials from workshops being held at that location. Had we been more organized, we would also have scheduled dates and times (mornings, afternoon and evening timeslots) to coordinate collection activities. As noted earlier, each document included penciled notations identifying time and location of its distribution. We were careful to include with all the material sent to Labadie a copy of the forum program which will serve as a tool in arranging the collection.

We next discussed the survey designed to elicit information from USSF participants information that would be of assistance to librarians who hope to engage the 10-Point Program’s call for “active solidarity-based provision of information assistance to these groups [the poor, marginalized and discriminated against] and their advocates in their struggles.”

Next, Kathleen informed the group of the work librarians are doing with immigrant communities and in protecting immigrant rights. In response to a question about why librarians are involved in immigrant issues, Kathleen described how libraries serve immigrants and should be known to be safe spaces for immigrants especially at a time when so much anti-immigrant sentiment drives public policy. She went on to say that presently over 1,000 pieces of legislation are being considered at the state level alone all aimed at curtailing immigrant rights. Copies of Kathleen’s report were distributed both at our meeting and at other USSF events, and an updated version will appear in *Progressive Librarian* #29, Summer 2007.

Our meeting ended with a question and a charge that each of us pursue an answer – How can libraries be made less loyal to national governments and more loyal to the international community? Food for thought!

*An interlude*

Before continuing with this report, we wish to address objections within PLG which were raised prior to the forum on the PLG listserv (PLGnet-L) and on the international progressive librarians list (lib-plic) with the decision to form a joint delegation to the USSF with Radical Reference, and afterwards to the activities proposed by the people attending as
delegates. In an attempt to clarify concerns raised, Shiraz Durrani, a longstanding friend of PLG’s in London and author most recently of *Never Be Silent: Publishing & Imperialism in Kenya 1884-1963* (London: Vita Books, 2006), posted an e-mail (see Appendix E) in early May outlining concisely – and constructively – several objections to the joint delegation and to USSF participation itself. A response to Shiraz’s e-mail is long overdue, but now informed by concrete experience. We offer the following response (which represents our response only). Shiraz’s statement serves to crystallize concerns raised by others, and so our response here is directed not to a specific individual who articulated the concerns of several people, but to the concerns themselves. We offer the following in the hopes that it constitutes a constructive contribution to an ongoing dialogue concerning PLG’s engagement in social movement activism.

At the end of his e-mail, Shiraz states, “It is only on the basis of (1) a clear socialist programme; (2) a strong organisational frame work that progressive librarians can have an impact on USSF and be able to continue useful work after USSF…”

Regarding the first point, unfortunately, PLG is not a socialist organization. We certainly could be, but we have never articulated a political program. Perhaps it is time to formulate one. We have relied for too long on the knowledge that underlying PLG’s statement of purpose are socialist sentiments, but they are nowhere articulated in any direct way, not even in the 10-Point Program. New PLG members have no reason to know that the guiding spirits of PLG’s existence are both the ideals of socialism, in the economic sphere, and democracy, in the political sphere. Only people who can “read between the lines” and who have a grounding in the history of the Left can connect PLG’s documents to socialist sentiments.

Regarding the second point, Shiraz is absolutely correct in noting the need for organizational frameworks for effective engagement within the social forum milieu. Here, however, it is important to distinguish between two arenas of engagement within the forum:

1) PLG’s relations with other library organizations, and
2) PLG’s relations with other (non-library) activist organizations.

The proposal for a joint PLG and RR delegation did, indeed, follow Shiraz’s suggestion that “Cooperation for USSF be only on the basis of ’organization-to-organization’…” Although these two groups have very different organizational structures, they both do (1) have members and (2) engage in activities. In regard to the extent to which they “organize at home,” one must ask, “How is home defined?” Neither PLG nor RR has a home per se, no single city or town serves as a base for either, and our memberships are broadly dispersed, with communications based almost solely over the internet.

The next suggestion is that PLG serve as “host organization” for all
librarian work at USSF, and that other library groups submit agendas and programs to PLG for approval. This sort of hierarchy and self-appointed authority is, however, in violation of the fundamental principles of the social forum, which itself only requires that participating organizations adhere to a general position of opposition to neo-liberalism and militarism. That said, the social forum is certainly a space within which to begin to build organizational relationships based on jointly arrived-at and shared principles – the 10-Point Program being an excellent place to start.

In regard to the 10-Point Program, clearly the raison d’etre of Radical Reference is described quite well by point #3, and the activities at the USSF’s Media Justice Center embody, not only the sentiments expressed by these words, but the fact of actual “active solidarity-based provision of information assistance to these groups and their advocates in their struggles.” Perhaps a next step for PLG is to present the 10-Point Program to Radical Reference with an invitation to endorse it.

Shiraz’s next point is that “Any ‘library’ activity undertaken would not be to collect, disseminate etc. material that does not meet our programme… [but] to collect alternative material which focus on the 10 point programme and have socialism as their vision.” Again, it will be helpful in responding to clarify the purpose of any collection activities.

At the USSF our tiny troop hoped simply to collect materials documenting the event and its participants. This seems in keeping with the intentions of our colleagues at the World Social Forum in Nairobi. If, however, we had sought only to document the presence of groups that had signed on to the 10-Point Program, we would have nothing to collect except PLG’s own documents. Similarly, had we focused exclusively on collecting documentation from only socialist organizations, we would surely have (1) gotten bogged down in trying to determine the politics behind each document and (2) violated point #6 of the 10-Point Program itself, which calls for collection of “…materials representing a wide range of progressive viewpoints…” Important to note, as an aside, is that organizations which claim to adhere to socialist ideals sometimes do not, and some organizations that don’t ever use the word “socialist” are, at heart, exactly that.

At this point in time, within the U.S. in any event, we simply do not have the benefit of political clarity that informed many of the struggles of the 20th century and earlier times. This is not to say that political clarity and unity is irrelevant – quite the contrary. And it is precisely here that the social forum, as a meeting grounds, exhibits an understanding of the present that we ignore, or dismiss, or ridicule only at our own expense.

One of PLG’s greatest strengths is the presence within our ranks of members of the New Left, who have an appreciation for and historic understanding of the Old Left – Shiraz, Mark Rosenzweig, John Buschman, ourselves and many others. Another strength is PLG’s commitment to the power of the human intellect grounded in a material reality that can be known
and shared. What has been largely missing from our commitment to understanding the world, is compassion, patience and the ability to engage – from a foundation of mutual respect – in constructive communication with colleagues whose lives have been shaped by a political climate quite different from that of our own generation’s. A very important, and extremely frustrating, aspect of the political climate today which makes communications difficult, is the unremitting anti-intellectual milieu within which political perspectives are formed.

A recent article by Steve Sherman entitled “Achievements & Limits of the First United States Social Forum” has something quite relevant to say in this regard,

…I think the weakness of the forum was its anti-intellectualism… pervasive in American life. It was visible [at the forum] in a number of forms – the tendency on plenaries to conflate capitalism and racism, class and race; the priority given to “popular education” (indistinguishable from the sorts of games and group activities widely promoted by the educational establishment in the US as an alternative to the demanding and sometimes unpleasurable activities of reading and listening) over analysis and debate in workshops; and, perhaps most significantly, the exclusion of any academic voices from the plenaries…. And these debates would greatly benefit from the participation of left academics. I know why the organizers are so suspicious of academics. They can be arrogant, obscurantist, competitive, oblivious to alternative ways of talking about realities…. Academics frequently use the experience of activists as fodder to advance their careers. This does not, however, mean that they are irrelevant.

Or, we might add, incapable of change in a direction characterized by mutual respect between people of the academy and those of the world beyond the campus periphery.

Sherman captures, in a nutshell, a dynamic we have observed directly within the progressive library community. When we sit around the table at a PLG meeting, who is it that does most of the talking? What might those who don’t speak be thinking and perhaps wanting to say? Is not our first task to find out what new people might be bringing to the table? And, they have come for a reason – what PLG has said and done is meaningful to them. But do they find a place? Are they brought into the fold, given a warm and genuine welcome? In the words of José Corrêa Leite, in his book *The World Social Forum: Strategies of Resistance*, “The WSF united without commanding, and preserved ideological and organizational diversity – a practice that is still strange for a large part of the Left.” (p.109)

We believe that this experience with the USSF, as with concerns raised at the Joint Conference of Librarians of Color (see “Report from the Joint Conference of Librarians of Color” at http://libr.org/plg/jclc2006.php),
provides PLG with an opportunity to reflect on our organizational culture and to consider the next stage in our development as an organization. PLG has a strong history of activism and knowledge to bring to the social forum movement. As PLGer Susan Maret recently asked when discussing matters we could bring to the social forum, “What about the issues that challenge libraries and info workers in this era of globalization, continuing media control, war, lies, censorship, commodification, and worldwide government restriction of info? Assaults on the right to communicate?” These are, indeed, matters that PLG could and should bring to venues like the USSF. We also need to balance the knowledge we have to share, with the knowledge we have yet to learn. And it is at this intersection that each of us, as individual human beings, need to be aware of, and open to, the presence, experience and knowledge of other individual human beings.

In concluding this interlude, we note that Shiraz called for political definition, clarity and unity – we agree wholeheartedly. We see PLG’s participation in the USSF as one step in the process of maturing politically as an organization.

June 29th, a tale of three surveys

...We are reaching out to our sisters and brothers around the world to help build a cooperative world of peace, justice, equality, solidarity, and self-determination. Underlying all of PLG’s work is our explicit recognition of librarianship as a contested terrain between the forces of corporate-driven agendas and the defenders of the public sphere. Not always explicit, however, is PLG’s solidarity with other social sectors also actively opposed to corporate agendas. The bulk of PLG’s work is done within the confines of our profession, where we work diligently to bring issues from the larger world to the attention of our colleagues. For example, in recent years the American Library Association took positions on torture and disinformation campaigns. The resolutions on which these positions were based were written by and shepherded through the ALA bureaucracy by PLG members and others. We have done quite well in helping ALA live up to its declarations regarding social responsibilities. When it comes to connecting librarianship to social activism beyond the walls of our profession, however, PLG falls short – a failure prompting our support for involvement in the USSF, and for a joint delegation with Radical Reference.

The quote above, again from the welcome message from the USSF program, ties to another of the PLG and RR activities at the forum – the survey – which sought to address the construction of relationships between library activists and others. How are we librarians to know how to help if we don’t know what help might be needed? None of us are omniscient. We can only know how to help if we let it be known that (1) we want to
help and (2) that we are willing to listen to people’s questions and actively address their needs. Thus the survey.

Members of our PLG and RR delegation saw our participation at the USSF as a golden opportunity to find out something about what relationship (if any) social movement activists might have with libraries. Reflecting our differences as organizations, the nature of the questions each of us were interested in posing were quite different, but we managed to come up with a single survey satisfactory to all (see Appendix D). The survey could be completed in three different ways: as an interview between librarian and activist or as a form filled out in the presence of the librarian, or completed at leisure to be deposited in a central location. On Friday morning, Elaine conducted three interviews, a brief report of which will suffice to give an indication of what information might be learned from such a survey.

Before offering the report, however, one important note must be made. In formulating the survey we considered what sort of demographic information we might need from the individuals responding. We decided on only two – age and residence. We certainly considered asking for other identifiers – race, gender, sexuality, ability, ethnicity – but decided against these specificities. We also considered asking responders to self-identify themselves, but again decided against this. We made this decision on the grounds that the social forum is bringing together human beings whose fundamental identification is as humans reaching out to other humans and to all beings with whom we share this planet. At our meeting on Thursday morning we discussed this approach and those attending thought it reasonable. However, we do not know if this was wise or not, and we would like very much for you, dear reader, to let us know what you think of this decision. As you read the report below, please ask yourself if it would have been helpful to know more about the identity of the individuals responding to the survey.

1st Interview: A Veterans for Peace Activist

The first person interviewed was 56-65 years old, currently living in Madison, Wisconsin, but originally from Mississippi, and active in counter-recruitment, specifically in TAMÉ (Truth and Alternatives to the Military through Education). This person had been an activist since September 11, 2001, and was inspired towards activist work through things a grandmother had said when this person was a child, through personal experiences in Vietnam, and through knowledge of the ignorance people in the U.S. have about the realities of war.

This person keeps informed about issues by reading “about the truth about this country” and recommends to others the Veterans for Peace website (http://www.veteransforpeace.org/) as a good source of information regarding counter-recruitment and peace activism. When in need of information this person sometimes utilizes friends, family members, other knowledgeable people, print materials, and databases; frequently
uses information available freely over the internet; and uses the library to “brush up on something from the past.” This person has no trouble finding information, with the exception of statistics and is helped by their spouse when this sort of information is needed.

Concerning library use, this person reports using public library for activist work for “books that have information about previous activists like Gandhi, and if I’m speaking [at an event, I use the library] to verify quotes.” The most important service the library provides is “knowledge.” In response to the question about how the library could be improved, the person said “have more [libraries].” Also used by this activist is “a place in Madison called Infoshop on Williamson Street.” The main library in Madison hosts all the TAME and Veterans for Peace meetings attended by this person. Radical Reference workshops of interest to this person are “Fact-up: Fact-Checking and FOIA,” “Free Information! Free Space! Using Your Public Library,” and “Beyond Googling It: News and Government Information ‘Web 2.0’ Style.” This person would like to see a resource guide on the topic of counter-recruitment, one that makes sure to inform people about the provisions in the No Child Left Behind legislation that requires schools to give military recruiters the names and contact information of students.

When asked for comments or suggestions for librarians this person replied “Keep up the good work!”

2nd Interview: An Environmental Activist

The second person interviewed was 26-30 years old from the Chicago suburbs, but traveling frequently to New Orleans and has been an activist on environmental issues for 7 years. This person didn’t hesitate to name two books that inspired their activism, both by Daniel Quinn, Ishmael and The Story of B.

To keep informed this person regularly uses listservs, the New York Times website and Democracy Now, and recommends to others that websites are “easiest” to keep informed about environmental issues. In response to questions about information sources, this person sometimes gets it from friends et al., print sources and databases; frequently uses the internet; uses television “less than sometimes” and doesn’t trust National Public Radio. The only information not easily found by this person are statistics.

Regarding library use, this person does use a library for “books that I need” and internet access. Improvements would be “coffee” and “closer to home.” Infoshops used included Lucy Parsons in Boston, Iron Rail in New Orleans and Brian MacKenzie Infoshop in Washington DC. This person has never attended a meeting related to activist work in a library and expressed surprise that libraries can be used for such events. This person was interested in all the RR workshops listed in the survey, and would like to see added to this list a workshop on “being more organized and focused.” Resource guides this person suggests are on “science-related
activism, using science for organizing, radical science information, DIY projects [like] work with sunflowers [that extract lead from contaminated soil].”

When asked for comments or suggestions for librarians this person replied “Keep it up!”

3rd Interview: Criminal Justice & Disabilities Activist

The third person interviewed was 31-35 years old, from Worchester, Massachusetts, and an activist on criminal justice and disabilities for the past five years. A personal experience inspired this person’s activism:

My mother worked with autistic children. I was 10 years old and one of her students wanted to meet me. I took two bags full of toys. She was wearing a helmet. [When we were playing she suddenly started using abusive language and] orderlies went to restrain the girl. I kicked the orderlies [because I thought they were hurting her]. My sense of injustice came from that experience.

To keep informed this person uses blog sites, e-mail and goes to meetings. To help others become informed criminal justice and disabilities this person said “I’d give them my business card and introduce them to the organization.” When in need of information this person always uses all of the sources listed in the survey, plus “networking.” The one area the person has trouble finding information in is financial information in the area of criminal justice.

When asked “Do you use a library,” the person replied “Oh, heck yea!” and went on to describe the local history section of their public library. The person would like more weekend hours at the library, has never used a library for any activist-related work, and has not used an infoshop. The only RR workshop of interest was “Research Like a Librarian.”

This activist had no other comments or suggestions for librarians.

What do these interviews have to tell us? Although only the sketchiest of conclusions can be drawn from this miniscule sample of interviews, we can state the following: (1) that either life experience or books can inspire activism at any point in life (a bibliography compiled from a large number of surveys, it might prove quite interesting and helpful); (2) that these people know where to get information, but sometimes might need help in some areas; (3) that they use libraries; (4) that some libraries provide a site for activist work (it would be worth exploring what factors make this possible); (5) that some activists are unaware that the library has a role to play in this regard (a situation that we progressive librarians might be in a position to remedy); and (6) that there is a need for and interest in services provided by libraries, infoshops and activist librarians. What we choose do with this sort of information is up to us.
At the end of the day, when all is said and done…

We [PLG] insist upon…the active solidarity-based provision of information assistance to these groups [poor, marginalized and discriminated against] and their advocates in their struggles.

When one considers that many PLG members are among “the poor, marginalized and [or] discriminated against,” the above quote from the 10-Point Program should end with the words “our struggles.” PLG has done no demographic analysis of our membership, so we cannot make any reliable claims one way or another, but it is probable that as a whole PLG members belong to the increasingly downwardly mobile middle class. We do have one member who reports an annual household income of $8,000, which is very low. The point here being that although PLG seems to distance itself in the above quote from those who struggle against the greater forces of oppression, any such distancing is both a mistake and an inaccuracy.

Through participation in the USSF, PLG acknowledged that the struggles of the poor, marginalized and discriminated against are, indeed, our struggles too, and that we are committed to putting into practice the words that were penned to paper in Vienna seven years ago. The challenge is to actually make connections in order to establish solidarity-based relationships with others outside of librarianship, a task with calls for openness, trust and mutual respect.

After briefly distinguishing “character” from “personality” in his book *Respect in a World of Inequality*, Richard Sennett writes:

> We can know personally very few individuals; in complex societies a varied cast of social types crowds the scene, their lives not instantly comprehensible. What is in us then, which responds to those whom we don’t personally know?...it is a matter of character rather than personality…[and character makes possible] treating with respect the need perceived in another when acting together. p.52-53

The task of social transformation requires a great deal of “acting together” not “doing for.” To the extent that PLG is capable of participating in the creation of “another world” and “another U.S.” we must engage with others, many others, from all walks of life. Later on in his book, Sennett notes that, “it would be naïve, indeed folly, to believe that society encourages… change,” and refers to the idea that “for the mass of modern workers, risk-taking inspires depression and foreboding rather than hope.” p. 240-1. It is not easy to engage in social change, not only does simple social inertia make it difficult, but forces intent on defending the status quo and inner turmoil as well apply enormous pressure on the individual activist from without and from within. We believe that PLG’s participation at the United States Social Forum, was a step forward in putting into practice the ideals of our organization.
APPENDIX A

PLG’s Commitment

* providing a forum for the open exchange of radical views on library issues.
* conducting campaigns to support progressive and democratic library activities locally, nationally and internationally.
* supporting activist librarians as they work to effect changes in their own libraries and communities.
* bridging the artificial and destructive gaps between school, public, academic and special libraries, and between public and technical services.
* encouraging debate about prevailing management strategies adopted directly from the business world, to propose democratic forms of library administration, and to foster unity between librarians and other library workers.
* critically considering the impact of technological change in the library workplace, on the provision of library services, and on the character of public discourse.
* monitoring the professional ethics of librarianship from a perspective of social responsibility.
* facilitating contacts between progressive librarians and other professional and scholarly groups dealing with communications and all the political, social, economic and cultural trends which impact upon it worldwide, in a global context.

APPENDIX B

Progressive Librarians Guild

Ten point program presented and adopted, 2000, Conference of progressive librarians sponsored by KRIBIBIE, Vienna

1. We shall work towards an international agenda as the basis of common action of librarians everywhere actively committed, as librarians, to social justice, equality, human welfare, and the development of cultural democracy.
2. We will unite librarians and information workers in opposition to the marketization of public goods, to privatization of social resources and to outsourcing of services and will oppose international treaties and institutions, which advance destructive neo-liberal policies.
3. We insist upon the equality of access to and inclusiveness of information services, especially extending such services to the poor, marginalized and discriminated against, including the active solidarity-based provision of information assistance to these groups and their advocates in their struggles.
4. We shall encourage the exploration of alternative models of human services; promote and disseminate critical analysis of information technology’s impact on libraries and societies; and support the fundamental democratization of existing institutions of education, culture, communications.

5. We shall undertake joint, interdisciplinary research into fundamental library issues (e.g. into the political economy of information in the age of neo-liberalism and corporate globalization) in order to lay the basis for effective action in our spheres of work.

6. We will support cooperative collection, organization and preservation of the documents of people’s struggles and the making available of alternative materials representing a wide range of progressive viewpoints often excluded as resources from the debates of our times.

7. We will investigate and organize efforts to make the library-as-workplace more democratic and encourage resistance to the managerialism of the present library culture.

8. We will lead in promoting international solidarity among librarians and cooperation between libraries across borders on the basis of our joint commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related covenants which create a democratic framework for constructive cooperative endeavours.

9. We will organize in common with other cultural and educational progressives, to help put issues of social responsibility on the agendas of international bodies such as IFLA and UNESCO.

10. We shall oppose corporate globalization which, despite its claims, reinforces existing social, economic, cultural inequalities, and insist on a democratic globalism and internationalism which respects and cultivates cultural plurality, which recognizes the sovereignty of peoples, which acknowledges the obligations of society to the individual and communities, and which prioritizes human values and needs over profits.

El programa de diez puntos presentado a los grupos reunidos en la Conferencia de Viena de bibliotecarios progresistas, patrocinada por KRIIBIE, 2000

1. Trabajar una agenda internacional con base en la labor de bibliotecarios activamente comprometidos con la justicia social, la igualdad, el bienestar humano y el desarrollo de la democracia cultural.

2. Unificar a los bibliotecarios y a los trabajadores de la informacion en contra de la mercantilizacion de los bienes publicos, de la privatizacion de los recursos sociales asi como oponerse a los tratados internacionales e instituciones que incluyan politicas neo-liberales.

3. Insistir en la igualdad del acceso y la inclusion social en los servicios de informacion y extender estos servicios a grupos de pobres, marginados o discriminados apoyandolos con informacion solidaria asi como en el respaldo de sus luchas sociales.

4. Fomentar la busqueda de modelos alternativos de servicios, promover y diseminar analisis criticos del impacto de la tecnologia sobre las
bibliotecas y la sociedad así como apoyar la democracia fundamental de las instituciones existentes de educación, cultura y comunicación.

5. Fortalecer la investigación interdisciplinaria de temas bibliotecarios fundamentales (p. ej. La economía política de la información en la era del neo-liberalismo y la globalización corporativa) para sentar las bases de una acción efectiva en nuestras esferas de trabajo.

6. Apoyar la recolección, la organización y la preservación de documentos de las luchas sociales de diversos grupos así como poner a disposición del público un espectro de materiales alternativos que representen un amplio panorama de puntos de vista progresistas que frecuentemente son excluidos del debate social.

7. Investigar y organizar esfuerzos para hacer a la biblioteca un lugar de trabajo más democrático y fomentar la resistencia a la “Gerencialización” de la cultura bibliotecaria actual.

8. Promover la solidaridad internacional entre bibliotecarios y la cooperación entre las bibliotecas basándose en un compromiso con la Declaración Universal de los Derechos Humanos y todos los Convenios relacionados que buscan crear un marco democrático para la construcción de esfuerzos cooperativos.

9. Organizarse con otros grupos educativos y culturales progresistas para ayudar a la construcción temática de las agendas que traten sobre la responsabilidad social de organismos internacionales tales como IFLA o UNESCO.

10. Oponerse a la globalización corporativa que, a pesar de sus defensores, refuerza la desigualdad social, económica y cultural e insistir en una globalización democrática e internacional que respeta y cultive la pluralidad, que reconozca la soberanía de los pueblos, que reconozca la obligación de la sociedad con sus individuos y comunidades y que haga prioritario los valores humanos por sobre las ganancias mercantiles.

APPENDIX C

By members of the Progressive Librarians Guild

ACT for Canada’s water. Flyer. www.canadians.org
Alliance for Democracy. Flyer. www.thealliancefordemocracy.org
Arab Movement of Women Arising for Justice (AMWJ). List of events, one page
A CALL TO ALL ARABS. Flyer. JUSTICE@ARABORGANIZING.ORG
Celebrate Blue October. Flyer. www.blueoctobercampaign.org
Choice USA. Flyer. One page folded in three. www.choiceusa.org
Choice USA. Fairness in Flowers: Making Global Connections between...
Economic and Reproductive Justice. Flyer. www.choiceusa.org
Cuba and the US Social Forum. www.cubasolidarity.com
Cuban Five. International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban Five. The Case of the Cuban 5. One page folded in thirds. libertadalos5ya@gamil.com; www.antiterroristas.cu Who are the Cuban Five? Flyer. www.freethefive.org; www.antiterroristas.cu
Defend the Global Commons. Food & Water Watch. Flyer, 2 sheets. www.foodandwaterwatch.org
Democracy at the US Social Forum. Booklet listing sessions sponsored by various groups. 2 copies
Democracy Unlimited of Humboldt County. Pamphlet. www.DUHC.org
Democratizing Education. Manski, Ben. 2 pages. http://DemocratizingEducation.org
DIGITAL RESISTANCE, YOUTH SOLIDARITY NETWORK. One page sign-up sheet. www.youthsolidarity.net
Do it in Denver. Flyer. www.recreate68.org
Global Women’s Strike. Flyer. www.globalwomenstrike.net; www.refusingtokill.net
Green Institute News. www.greeninstitute.net
Greensboro Truth & Reconciliation Commission. 16 page booklet. www.greensborotrc.org
International Action Center. Flyer. www.iacenter.org
International Jewish Solidarity. The Role of anti-Zionist Jews in the Palestine Solidarity Movement (a panel) and Unlearning Zionism: Transforming Collective Trauma towards Justice. One page announcement of sessions. www.jewishsolidarity.info
Just Chicken. Flyer announcing session on the poultry industry; various sponsors.
Media Action Grassroots Network. Cardboard and wood fan. 2 copies. www.mediaroots.org
Palestine and Middle East Solidarity Track. 4 pages. ussfpalestinesolidarity.

Palestine Israel Education Project. One glossy page folded in three. (Two copies.) www.thinkpep.net


Palestine Unites Us: First Popular Conference for Palestinians in the U.S. One page folded in three. palestineconferenceusa@yahoo.com

LUIS POSADA CARRILES [See Should the United States harbor an international terrorist?] Progressive Democrats of America. Three half-page leaflets: Healthcare for All; Clean Fair Transparent Elections; Stop Global Warming. One reprinted article from San Diego Union-Tribune. www.pdamerica.org


Project South. www.projectsouth.org


Resource Generation. 3 flyers. www.resourcegeneration.org


SDS GUIDE to the USSF. 4 pages. And SDS at the USSF. 3 sheets. http://newsds.org

Sierra Club Corporate Accountability Committee Water Privatization Task Force. One page folded in three. (Two copies.) www.sierraclub.org/cac/water

Sierra Club Mother Lode Chapter. Postcard to Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors


Social Responsibilities Round Table. American Library Association. One page folded in three. 2 copies. www.libr.org/SSRT/

Student Labor Action Protest. Flyer. www.americanrights@work.org

Technology for Another World. 12 pages newsprint, info@demoocracyinaction.org

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOTTLE: CHALLENGE CORPORATE CONTROL OF WATER. 1/2 page flyer. (2 copies.) www.StopCorporateAbuse.org
foodandwaterwatch.org
USSF Film Festival. Schedule
We are the Alliance for Democracy. Flyer. www.thealliancefordemocracy.
.org
WISE EARTH. Flyer. www.wiserearth.org
The World Can’t Wait. 2008 is too late. Flyer, 10 copies. worldcantwait.
.org
World Can’t Wait Workshops at the USSF. worldcantwait.org
Yes! Magazine. Flyer. www.yesmagazine.org/ussf
Young Communist League. Youth Bill of Rights for the 2008 Elections. 1
sheet folded in half. www.yclusa.org

APPENDIX D
USSF 2007 SURVEY
Help Librarians Help You!
Progressive Librarians Guild & Radical Reference
www.libr.org/PLG  www.radicalreference.info

Return completed survey to Library Box at the Media Center check-in
located inside the Civic Center

What is your age?

10-15_____  26-30_____  46-55_____
16-20_____  31-35_____  56-65_____
21-25_____  36-45_____  65-_____

Where are you from (town and country)?

What is/are your area(s) of activism?

How long have you been an activist?

Was there anything you read (or had read to you) at any time in your life
that inspired your activism?

Yes_____  No_____
If so, what was it?

How do you keep informed about the issues that concern you?

If someone wanted to become informed about the area you are most active
in, what source/s of information would you recommend?

When you need information about something, you go to... (write “A” for always, “F” for frequently, “S” for sometimes, and “N” for never)

_____a friend, family member or other knowledgeable person
_____print materials (books, directories, magazines, etc.)
_____the Internet - freely available sites and resources
_____the Internet - periodical databases, online encyclopedias, and other fee-based resources accessible through public or academic libraries
_____other ____________________________

Areas of information you can’t easily find or have struggled with, by any method, include... (check all that apply)

_____news and current events
_____statistics
_____local information about my community (organizations, activities, etc.)
_____facts about my community (demographics, government information, etc.)
_____financial figures (government budgets, campaign contributions, etc.)
_____other ____________________________

Do you use a library?  Yes____  No____

Do you use your library for anything related to your activist work?

If yes, in what manner?

If no, why don’t you?

_____the library does not have needed materials
_____the library has limited hours
_____the library is in an inconvenient location
_____the library and its staff are not welcoming
_____other, please describe briefly

What is the most important service your library provides for you?

If you could make one improvement to your library, what would it be?

Have you ever used an activist library or archive?  (eg. Zine library, GLBT archive, union library, infoshop)

Yes____  No____

If yes, please specify:

Have you ever attended or held a meeting related to your activist work at a library?

Yes____  No____

If yes, please specify:
These are workshops Radical Reference has conducted in the past in various cities. If one of these were offered in your area, would you attend? (check all that apply)

____Research Like a Librarian
____Free Information! Free Space! Using Your Public Library
____Wouldn’t You Like to Be a Blogger, Too?
____Beyond Googling It: News and Government Information “Web 2.0” Style

Can you suggest any other skills that would help you find and use information in the campaigns you are active in?

The resource guides on the Radical Reference website include topics like Tools for Statistics; Alternative Radio and Audio Resources; Bicycling Resources; The Green Scare; and Anti-Racism for Activists: a Bibliography. What are some other topics you’d find useful in an online guide written by librarians?

Any other comments or suggestions for us?

Thank you so much for your time. Would you be interested in receiving a copy of the results of our survey? If so, please provide your mailing and/or e-mail address below.

APPENDIX E

E-mail from Shiraz Durrani to lib-plic, May 9, 2007

Perhaps there is a need for a brief pause to see where we go with all this. WSFs come and go, and WSF is not a socialist forum, but a “social” one with all sorts of tendencies - some left, some right, all having equal weight. It is easy to get mesmerised by thousands of people and programmes. One needs to be clear about where “we” go in this context - and also to know who “we” are.

Going by the experience of the Kenyan politics some years back, we formed a political movement of Kenyans overseas (called Ukenya; Umoja). But the key aspects we were interested in keeping in sight were:

1. Keeping politics in command - there are thousands of Kenyans all over the world, but we were interested only in those who were interested in a socialist Kenya
2. Only those who were or wanted to be active in the organisation - not to be fee paying members who could go to sleep rest of the time, but wake up and make noise from time to time (as happens with political parties in
Kenya) – we called it the KANU politics

3. Only those who were in active organisations. Thus we formed seven Ukenya branches in Scandinavia, USA, Zimbabwe, England, Australia etc. Only the elected representatives of these organisations could be part of the decision-making body which was based in London

4. The organisation was closely linked to the underground political party in Kenya (December Twelve Movement-Mwakenya) so that we were linked to the real struggles of workers and peasants.

All this may seem rather remote from USSF, BUT I think it is important to set up clear goals and learn from past experience. I was not at the Nairobi WSF (though I took part in the pre-conference Workshops), but am rather disappointed to note that there has been no political programme, organisation or action that has emerged from the involvement of so many librarians (I would be most happy to be proved wrong on this point). There is a danger of getting involved in WSF activities only as “professionals” and leave our politics locked up at home.

I do not believe that this is what PLG stands for or wants.

I suggest:

1. Cooperation for USSF be only on the basis of “organisation-to-organisation” with each organisation actively organizing in their home front - they need to have members and take up activities and organize at home. Only this can give them credibility

2. Each organisation to submit their agenda/programme to PLG who, as host organisation, should be the co-ordinating body for all activities and programmes

3. Joint work can then be undertaken on the basis that all adhere to the 10-point programme (prepared by Mark and others)

4. Such co-operation should not be on the basis of individual participation - or on the basis of “official” library associations which do not subscribe to the 10-point plan.

5. Any “library” activity undertaken would not be to collect, disseminate etc material that does not meet our programme - there are lots of others doing it - our job should be to collect alternative material which focus on the 10 point programme and have socialism as their vision. We should not become slaves of those who oppose our vision, organizations and programmes.

It is only on the basis of (1) a clear socialist programme; (2) a strong organisational framework that progressive librarians can have an impact on USSF and be able to continue useful work after USSF which is perhaps also an important aspect that need to be thought about. The key point is to keep politics in command.

shiraz
Works Cited


Durrani, Shiraz. Reflections on the draft proposal for the USSF, e-mail posted to lib-plic@yahoogroups.com on May 9, 2007.


“Report from the Joint Conference of Librarians of Color” In October, Kathleen, Elaine and Isabel Espinal presented a program at the first, and historic, Joint Conference of Librarians of Color in Dallas, Texas. Sponsored by the Black Caucus of ALA, American Indian Library Association, Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association, Chinese-American Librarians Association and REFORMA (National Association to Promote Library Services to the Spanish Speaking), the conference brought together librarians of all colors to share experiences, best practices, research, theory, and to make new connections, build and strengthen coalitions. Our presentations were well received by a large, standing-room-only audience, and can be found at http://libr.org/plg/jclc2006.html.


United States Social Forum: Another World is Possible * Another U.S. is Necessary, June 27-July 1, 2007. Atlanta, Georgia. [Atlanta: USSF, 2007]