
ALA, IFLA and Cuba

Introduction

The island of Cuba was inhabited by a number of indigenous peoples before the European age of conquest. The earliest archeological evidence dates to 3100 BC. Although some small communities remain, these cultures were largely destroyed by the colonizers. In 1492, Christopher Columbus landed in Cuba and claimed it for the Spanish Kingdom, and it remained a Spanish colony until Spain lost the Spanish-American War in 1898. The Treaty of Paris brought the war to a conclusion. The US gained control over Puerto Rico and Guam, and paid Spain \$20 million for the Philippines. The US also took over Cuba and administered it until its formal independence in 1902. A 1901 amendment to the US Army appropriations bill, known as the Platt Amendment, stipulated conditions for the withdrawal of US troops, stated that the US had the unilateral right to intervene in Cuban affairs, and established the right for the US to lease land for naval bases. The Platt Amendment was incorporated into the Cuban Constitution in 1901, and became part of the 1903 Cuban-American Treaty of Relations. The US Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay was established in 1898 and continues under this authority. The US then occupied Cuba again from 1906 to 1909, 1912, and 1917 to 1922 to quell various rebellions, including an attempt to form a separate black republic in Oriente Province in 1912. By the 1930s, formal intervention was no longer required to maintain US domination.

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The 1959 Cuban Revolution threw out the US client government of Sergeant Fulgencio Batista. The US again tried but this time failed to overthrow the Cuban government through the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961. Anything might have happened during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, but the world managed to survive destruction from US and Soviet nuclear bombs.

The US broke diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1961. Each country established an “Interests Section” in the other country in 1977. The Interests Sections were housed within the Swiss Embassies. The US imposed a commercial, economic, and financial boycott of Cuba, phased in immediately after the 1959 revolution and extended in 1962 and 1963. Little changed from that time until December 2014, when President Obama announced the beginning of a new approach to relations with Cuba. I will address the current situation near the end of this article.

US government actions to overthrow the Cuban government and the gains of the Cuban Revolution have been two-pronged, external and overt as well as internal and clandestine. These long-standing and brutal measures have included propaganda, diplomatic and commercial isolation, trade embargo, sabotage, terrorism and military support to counter-revolutionaries (including the 1976 bombing of a Cuban commercial airplane), the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, numerous assassination plots against Fidel Castro and other leaders, possible biological and chemical warfare, and efforts to create fake civil society organizations to foment political opposition. The CIA, US Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Congress have played key roles. In 1983, Congress created and funded the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to engage in secret civil society initiatives. One of the first recipients of NED funds was the Cuban American National Foundation based in Miami. The 1992 Cuban Democracy Act, better known as the Torricelli Act supported US non-governmental organizations and individuals to bring “non-violent democratic change to Cuba.” This was intensified with the 1998 Helms-Burton Act described below.¹

The violent, imperial history between the US and Cuba has permeated all aspects of US relations with Cuba, including library relations. Some members of the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) of the American Library Association (ALA) members took up issues around Cuba starting from at least 1989. Although not an official SRRT activity, a librarians tour to Cuba was publicized in the June 1989 *SRRT Newsletter*.² Cuba and its library profession created a big splash in the international library community when its libraries and librarians hosted the 60th International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Conference in Havana. This 1994 meeting was the first IFLA conference ever held in Latin America. Although the ALA Council supported the venue,³ many US librarians were dissuaded from attending the conference due to the embargo and the voices of prominent conservative

librarians, especially Beverly Lynch. Because of this debate, SRRT affirmed its support for the venue in 1993.⁴ More than 100 US librarians attended, and 67 holding various political perspectives signed a statement endorsing the normalization of relations and an end to the US embargo.⁵ The statement also noted the Cuban librarians' "...deep professional commitment to common professional objectives...", and that the signers were "...deeply moved by their generosity... despite their problems."

Early SRRT and UK Activities and the Helms-Burton Act

ALA SRRT followed up the IFLA conference with a program titled, "Cuba: the Cultural Cost of the Blockade," at the June 1995 ALA Conference in Chicago. Al Kagan chaired, and the panel featured Marta Terry, Director of the Biblioteca Nacional Jose Marti in Havana, Jose Manual Perez of Ediciones Melcher in Puerto Rico, and Ann Sparanese from the Englewood (NJ) Public Library. All had participated in the Havana IFLA Conference. In line with State Department tactics, Terry received her visa only hours before her flight.⁶

There was very little activity around Cuba in ALA or SRRT from 1995 until January 2000. But the US government including the Congress were busy during this period. Congress passed the Helms-Burton Act in 1998 (Public Law 104-114), which was intended "...to bring about a peaceful transition to a representative democracy and market economy in Cuba." Among other provisions, it extended the embargo to foreign companies trading with Cuba, authorized television broadcasting from the US to Cuba (TV Marti), authorized funding dissident groups, and prohibited recognition of any Cuban government that includes Fidel or Raul Castro.⁷ In other words, this so-called "peaceful transition" meant what we now term "regime change" and was fully intended to destabilize the Cuban government. In retaliation, the Cuban Government passed Cuban Penal Code and Law #88, the Law for the Protection of National Independence and the Economy of Cuba. This law made it illegal to take money or get support for activities sponsored under the Helms-Burton Act.

The US government then funded numerous tiny dissident groups, including the "independent librarians" in Cuba and the Friends of Cuban Libraries in the US. The so-called independent librarians were neither independent nor librarians. They were dissidents who had private book collections, who supposedly opened these collections to other Cubans. They were journalists, lawyers, doctors, poets, etc. who had never worked as librarians. Although the US had closed its embassy in Havana, it did have an Interests Section located in the Swiss Embassy. The US Interests Section gave books, equipment, and other aid to these private "libraries." Robert Kent from the New York Public Library was the chief proponent of the tiny group, Friends of Cuban Libraries. He visited Cuba at least ten times delivering various kinds of aid and money

for USAID funded organizations. He was arrested and deported on his last trip in 1999.⁸

A USAID funded website in Florida, CubaNet, and Friends of Cuban Libraries (FCL) alleged intimidation of the “independent librarians.” These groups appealed for help to the IFLA Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression Committee (FAIFE). FCL’s propaganda campaign gained momentum when FAIFE issued a 1999 report based on information from both FCL and the Asociación Cubana de Bibliotecarios (ASCUBI), the Cuban library association. However, the report basically affirmed the FCL position, that is repression of the “independent librarians.”⁹

Progressive librarians in the UK were the first LIS group to respond to the US destabilization campaign. The Cuban Libraries Support Group (CLSG) was established on 1 July 1999. The objectives were to support: “Cuban libraries, librarians, 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 self determination and to chose the social, political and economic systems which support their library service.” The CLSG worked in partnership with four British organizations: Information for Social Change, a progressive librarians’ network; the Library Association (LA), which passed a motion in favor of Cuban libraries at its Annual General Meeting; Book Aid International, which sends books to Cuban libraries; and the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. The Cuban Libraries Support Group built on a positive 1994 resolution to the LA by calling in 1999 for LA recognition of Cuba’s advancements in librarianship, literacy, and education; recognition of the difficult economic conditions caused by the “illegal 40 year US blockade,” urging IFLA to call on the US government to end the blockade, and sending a fact-finding visit to Cuba.¹⁰ The Library Association’s Annual General Meetings approved both of these resolutions, but both were referred back to the International Committee and never got to the LA Council.¹¹

Responding to the FAIFE Report’s criticism of Cuban government actions against the “independent librarians,” Ann Sparanese submitted a resolution to the SRRT Action Council which was passed by Action Council at the ALA Midwinter Meeting in January 2000. In this way, SRRT went on record by rejecting the legitimacy of the Friends of Cuban Libraries, supporting exchanges between US and Cuban librarians, supporting the efforts of the CLSG in promoting positive interaction, calling for an end to the travel ban and blockade, and advocating the normalization of relations between the US and Cuba.¹²

In March 2000, Rhonda Neugebauer, Latin American Studies Bibliographer at the University of California Riverside, led a tour of 17 US librarians to further investigate the Cuban library situation. They went to the National Library, the National Technical Library School, and attended a five-day library colloquium.

Several people also visited two of the so-called independent libraries. Neugebauer reported that the first home had a normal sized bookshelf and the second had no books at all. The owners said that they got monthly shipments of books and other materials and some money from Miami and Mexico. Some of the books were published and donated by the prominent right-wing Cuban American National Foundation in Miami.¹³

Background on the US Propaganda Campaign and the “Independent Libraries”

In 1998, the couple Ramon Colas and Berta Mexidor created the first so-called “independent library” in their home. In 1999, the US government funded a US domestic group, Friends of Cuban Libraries, to support the “independent libraries.”¹⁴ Its chief agent was Robert Kent at the New York Public Library. Colas and Mexidor immigrated to the US in December 2001, and established the non-profit organization in 2003, Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba. They set up a website, published a 3-fold brochure, and issued a poster featuring 17 imprisoned “librarians” (including photos of 15) and a small foldout pamphlet with profiles of the individuals. It is interesting that the pamphlet listed the organization’s contact addresses and phone numbers in both Havana and Miami. In 2003, Ramon Colas testified before the Committee on International Relations of the US House of Representatives, where he claimed that the dissident movement was

...legitimate and authentically Cuban. To imply that it was created by the United States Interests Section in Havana is racist, since it means that Havana underestimates its own people to such an extent as to believe that they are not capable of struggling for themselves for their own liberty.

However, note that an IRC document showed that the Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba received 98% of its funding from the US government.¹⁵

The US Interests Section in Havana stepped up its destabilization activities in the fall of 2002 under its new head, James Cason. His actions included attending meetings in dissidents’ homes where he gave informal press conferences, personally launching the youth wing of the tiny dissident Liberal Party, and hosting a workshop for “independent journalists” in his home.¹⁶ Cason’s initiatives were very far over the line for diplomats in any country, and he consequently provoked the arrest of seventy-five people, some involved with the “independent librarians.” However, reports did not list these individuals primarily as librarians, but rather as people with other professions.

For example, Friends of Cuban Libraries identified eight of these individuals as librarians, but an Amnesty International report showed no connection to libraries for three of them. The other five had “private libraries” in their homes. Amnesty described five of them as journalists, five as leaders or members of human rights organizations, one as a surgeon, and one as a poet.¹⁷ The point of this analysis is that not even the Friends of Cuban Libraries and Amnesty International could agree on just who these so-called librarians were.

The US government’s propaganda campaign swung into action, and many people of good will who previously supported Cuban issues denounced the arrest of the seventy-five dissidents. But note that the dissidents were not arrested for speech, but rather for engaging in other unlawful activities, including receiving support from the US under the Helms-Burton Act for the purpose of “regime change.” *The Wall Street Journal* published an article on “Cuba’s Jailed Librarians” just before the 2003 ALA Annual Conference in Toronto.¹⁸ *The Wall Street Journal* author complained that although there would be a program on Cuba at ALA, it would not include any members of the so-called independent librarians. The article named three librarians who were taking the lead in countering Mr. Kent and the Friends of Cuban Libraries: Ann Sparanese, Rhonda Neugebauer, and Mark Rosenzweig. Further, the author noted that Nat Hentoff of the *Village Voice* had been castigating ALA in his columns on this issue. (This author had a particularly nasty phone call from Mr. Hentoff before the ALA conference.) However the ALA International Relations Committee did provide a forum for all points of view for a large audience at their conference program in Toronto but took no action. A *New York Times* article just after the conference called the debate “a little cultural cold war.”¹⁹ The article quoted Kent as well as ALA President Mitch Freedman, International Relations Committee Chair Winston Tabb, and ALA Councilor Mark Rosenzweig. Freedman and Tabb said that the issues were still too murky for ALA to take a position, but Rosenzweig called the so-called independent librarians “a rag tag bunch...on the fringes of the dissident movement.”²⁰ The *Los Angeles Times* published an opinion piece critical of ALA after the conference, which was then picked up by *National Review*.²¹ Articles were also allegedly published in the *Washington Times* and in some other newspapers.²² There was also a debate that year in the pages of the *U*N*A*B*A*S*H*E*D Librarian* between its columnist Sandy Berman, Al Kagan, and Ann Sparanese.²³ To complement the propaganda campaign, the Bibliotecas Independientes published a fiction anthology of the winning entries of their literature contest sometime in 2003.²⁴

In response to the US campaign, Cuban investigative reporters Rosa Miriam Elizalde and Luis Baez published a book titled, “*Los Disidentes*.”²⁵ In that work, the authors gave more biographical information about Ramon Colas. He was a psychologist who had held important positions in public health. He formed the Partido Revolucionario Martiano in 1994, and became a member of

the Colegio Medico Independiente (Association of Independent Physicians). He joined the Partido Solidaridad Democratica in 1996, and became the chair of its Las Tunas branch in 1997. He created and became director of the Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba in 1999, and then immigrated to the US in December 2001. He then became a member of the Cuban exile right-wing La Fundación Nacional Cubano Americana (Cuban American National Foundation), based in Miami. And he worked as an announcer on the Foundation's radio program.

In Elizalde and Baez's book, they described how the dissident organizations were infiltrated by the Cuban government, and how 12 government agents became dissident leaders. These agents testified at the trials of the 75 people convicted in 2003. Nine of these government agents worked as "independent journalists." They wrote that they were assigned directly by the US Interests Section to write specific articles attacking the Cuban government, the articles were then checked by the Section before being sent out to the media in Miami and Puerto Rico. In exchange, the agents, believed by the US Interest Section to be dissident journalists, were paid and guaranteed expedited US visas. According to a real Cuban journalist who was bought by the program, most of these "independent journalists" did not know anything about the profession, and they became the object of jokes because of their lack of knowledge of grammar and composition. The informants testified that these so-called "journalists" often made up their stories in order to show their benefactors what they wanted to see. These articles were published under different names to make it seem that there were a large number of dissidents reporting.²⁶

It is worth emphasizing the profound cumulative effect of US propaganda and its most important instrument, the Helms-Burton Act, which in calling for "regime change" was in effect a declaration of war. Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power did everything it could to counter Helms-Burton through its Law for the Protection of National Independence and the Economy of Cuba. By passing that law, the Cuban government made it clear that those getting money and resources provided through Helms-Burton would be considered subversive, not just ordinary domestic government opponents. The 2003 crackdown and arrest of 75 dissidents must be understood in this context. Although some of these 75 were very likely committing serious crimes, it is quite possible that some of those arrested were not doing much more than the kind of non-violent protest activities that are seen as normal in many countries of the world. It is collusion with the US propaganda campaign organized through the Helms-Burton Act that made these acts subversive under Cuban law.

Some Cuban dissidents who did not take direction and funding from the US Interests Section were not arrested. For example, Spanish born but Cuban citizen Elroy Gutiérrez-Menoyo was free to travel around the island and pursue his goal of democratic change through dialogue. He was invited to government gatherings, and was allowed to travel to Spain where he was born. However,

Gutiérrez-Menoyo noted that he only cooperated with people who are “totally independent.”²⁷ One can only speculate as to whether the Helms-Burton Act had the opposite effect intended, that of shutting down dialogue within Cuba.

Investigation at ACURIL Havana and Progress at IFLA Boston 2001

The ALA Latin American & Caribbean Subcommittee of the International Relations Committee (IRC) held a hearing at the Midwinter 2001 meeting where Robert Kent and others testified. The subcommittee found the information inconclusive with both sides questioning the accuracy and intentions of the other, and therefore the subcommittee recommended no further action.²⁸ The full IRC decided to keep the issue on its agenda, and especially to gather information at the forthcoming meeting of the Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL) in Havana.²⁹ A high-level US delegation of prominent librarians did go to the ACURIL meeting. They tried to contact nine “Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba” in Havana, but were only able to visit four of them. Two of the phone numbers given on the US government funded CubaNet or given by Robert Kent did not connect to the persons listed, one collection no longer existed, and two people had left the country. The US delegation found collections from 200 to 2000 volumes. None of the proprietors claimed to be librarians, and all stated that they were “dissidents,” “counter-revolutionaries,” or “members of opposition movements.” All said that they had been detained, for several hours up to several months, for political activities not related to their collections. The US delegates also visited several public libraries, where they found books that Robert Kent said were excluded from the catalogs, including one supposedly banned book that was recently checked-out. Kent had claimed that banned books were sometimes held but not represented in library catalogs. As a result, the delegation recommended formal cooperation between ALA and ASCUBI and between the Library Information Technology Association (LITA) with the Sociedad Cubana de Información Científica y Técnica (SOCICT, the Cuban Society of Scientific and Technical Information). The group also recommended other forms of cooperation, including a formal resolution on cooperation between institutions for the forthcoming IFLA conference in Boston.³⁰

Following up on these recommendations, the IRC successfully passed a resolution at ALA Council in June 2001. It urged the US government to share materials widely in Cuba including with the public libraries, urged the US government to establish lower postal fees for sending books, opposed US government efforts to limit information to Cuba, and urged IFLA to work to improve the Cuban people’s access to books and other information materials on all topics.³¹

IFLA then passed a resolution at its 2001 Boston Conference urging the US government to eliminate obstacles to access to information and professional

interaction imposed by the embargo, and urged the US government to share materials with Cuban libraries, not just the “independent libraries.” IFLA also urged the Cuban government to eliminate such obstacles. In an historic move, ALA and ASCUBI signed a cooperation agreement at the Boston meeting.³²

ALA Council’s Policy Statement on Cuba

The ALA International Relations Committee (IRC) brought a Resolution on Access to Information in Cuba³³ to the 2003 Annual Conference in Toronto. It included advocating “regime change” in Cuba, as advocated by the Friends of Cuban Libraries. The Council went into informal session for 30 minutes to consider the issues. Several speakers said that the resolution was hastily and poorly constructed, and was a response to national attention in the press. The Council allowed Marta Terry, former director of the Jose Marti National Library in Havana, to speak for a delegation of five Cuban librarians in attendance. She thanked ALA for the opportunity to come to the meeting, and said that they were defending the rights of 11 million Cubans to library service and cultural access. In the end, the Council referred the issue back to the IRC and the Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC).³⁴ The two committees established a task force,³⁵ which was asked to report back at the Midwinter 2004 meeting.

The Council endorsed the IRC/IFC joint report as ALA policy at the January 2004 Midwinter meeting.³⁶ It stated that ALA was deeply concerned about the recent arrests and prison terms of the “political dissidents”, but also that these dissidents did not consider themselves librarians. The report concluded that ALA joins IFLA in offering support to the Cuban library community in promoting free access to information, called on ASCUBI to implement a code of ethics (which it did), called for the elimination of the US embargo and travel restrictions, called on Cuba to adhere to Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, supported IFLA’s call for a visit to Cuba by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights with special attention to the recent arrests, and urged the Cuban library community to take a leading role in advancing freedom of information and expression. The report also noted the recent policy of the Canadian Library Association opposing foreign government attempts to undermine Cuba’s government through “economic blockades, subversion, military adventures, assassination attempts and outside funding of political opposition through ‘civil society’ organizations,”³⁷ and called on IFLA to further investigate the role of “independent libraries.”³⁸

ALA’s report was not good enough for Nat Hentoff and some other defenders of the “independent librarians.” Hentoff wanted ALA to support the “independent librarians.” Responding to a story in *Library Journal Academic Newswire* titled, “ALA and Cuba: Who’s Afraid of Nat Hentoff,” Steve Fesenmaier posted Hentoff’s rebuttal to ALA policy (as represented in the IRC/

IFC report) to the SRRT listserv. And Hentoff published a short article in his syndicated column about ALA's failure to call for the immediate release of the so-called librarians in the group of 75 who were arrested in 2003. Hentoff then published a longer article in *Village Voice News*, and returned his 1983 John Philip Immroth Memorial Award (given by the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee), and demanded that his name be taken off the list of winners. (His name still appears on the list with a note about his renunciation.) Editor of *Library Journal*, John Berry III then defended ALA in an editorial noting the thorough IRC/IFC report and showing that Hentoff's headline, "The ALA's Shameful Silence" was completely wrong and "sensational." Berry noted that *Library Journal* had printed almost a dozen accounts on ALA's Cuba discussions since 2000, and that ALA had made concerted attempts to establish relationships with Cuban working librarians and their professional association, ASCUBI. Then Hentoff published another letter to the editor in *American Libraries*. There were also several more columns and letters there, as well as a dialog between Hentoff and John W. Berry, then current IRC chair and executive director of the Northern Illinois Learning Resources Cooperative.³⁹

As IRC Chair, John W. Berry tried to go beyond the 2003 report endorsed by the ALA Council at the 2004 Orlando ALA Annual Conference. He misrepresented his intentions at the IRC meeting, and this only became clear in his report to the ALA Council. In that report, he said he intended to send letters in support of health care for sick prisoners which would be accompanied by a resolution from the Board of Trustees of the Vermillion (South Dakota) Public Library demanding the release of the "independent librarians." Three current IRC members were able to prevent sending these letters through discussion on the Council floor, and Berry later personally apologized for his misrepresentations to these IRC members: Al Kagan, Herb Biblo, and Ismail Abdullahi.⁴⁰ It is also interesting that the Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba set up an exhibit booth at the Orlando meeting.⁴¹

ALA Travel Policy and an Ambush

SRRT called for an end of travel restrictions to Cuba at the 2004 Orlando meeting.⁴² The IRC finally wrote a free travel resolution, which was passed by the ALA Council at Midwinter 2006 in San Antonio. The text was general and did not refer to any particular countries.⁴³ But there was more funny business at the San Antonio meeting. Robert Kent had obviously contacted and convinced the ALA President Program speaker, radio personality Romanian-American Andre Codrescu, to spend half his time attacking ALA for its stand on the "independent librarians." ALA President Michael Gorman was completely taken aback, but handled it with amazing calm while defending ALA's position. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* then published an article misrepresenting

both the speech and ALA's position. Michael Gorman responded by publishing a letter in *The Chronicle* calling Codrescu "...rude and devious to accept an invitation (and a fee) to speak on a topic and use that opportunity to attack your host..."⁴⁴ Two more prominent invited speakers also briefly supported the "independent librarians," former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright at the 2006 Annual Conference and journalist Anthony Lewis at the 2008 Midwinter Meeting.⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that both Codrescu and Albright have East European roots, and had personal experience with the previous communist regimes. Their kneejerk Cold War responses are therefore not especially surprising. Codrescu was born in Romania and Albright's family came from Czechoslovakia. As for Anthony Lewis, when he was told what ALA had actually done, he admitted, "Well, I really don't know that much about the issue."⁴⁶

Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba and other US NGO Funding

President George W. Bush established a commission to deal with current policy towards Cuba and make plans for US intervention in a future "transition government." The commission included members of all Cabinet level agencies, and it was chaired by the Secretary of State, Colin Powell. In 2004, the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, issued its first report to the President. It proposed a budget of two million dollars to re-stock, strengthen, and expand the Cuban independent library network. It recommended a future National Commission on Progress through Education that would assist Cuba's libraries in a "transition government." Perhaps most importantly for this article, the Commission recommended that the Institute for Museum and Library Services and the American Library Association support the effort of the future transition government to renovate and modernize Cuba's libraries, museums, and other information resources.⁴⁷ The Commission's second report included more of the same language, and called for "transition, not succession." It recommended the creation of a Cuba Fund for a Democratic Future with initial funding of \$80 million over two years, and then no less than \$20 million every year "until the dictatorship ceases to exist." \$24 million of the initial amount would go to "access to independent information."⁴⁸

Michael Dowling, Director of the ALA International Relations Office, researched and printed a "Cuba Update for ALA Annual 2008."⁴⁹ He noted that his office and the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom filed Freedom of Information requests to USAID and the State Department to get information on US support for the "independent libraries" in March 2007, but had got no response. But he said that much information was already available. For example, the US government spent \$74 million for "US democracy assistance for Cuba" for 1996 to 2005. He briefly noted the \$2 million for the "independent librarians" in the Commission's budget (described above), and listed further

US government aid for the “independent libraries” through Freedom House, the Sabre Foundation, the Pan American Development Foundation, the People in Need Foundation (Czech Republic), and the Mississippi Consortium for International Development and Jackson State University. He noted that the Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba reported government funding of \$81,821 for 2005 and \$129,945 for 2006 (98% of its income for both years). Dowling also wrote that USAID had an open call for bids on \$20 million to “hasten a peaceful transition to democracy.”

Friends of Cuban Libraries at IFLA

Michael Dowling’s 2008 report also noted that the US Embassy set up a meeting for Ramon Colas with the Uruguay Library Association before the 2004 Buenos Aires IFLA Conference. And that the Friends of Cuban Libraries asked the national library associations of Estonia, Poland, and the Czech Republic to pass a resolution at the 2005 Oslo IFLA Conference in support of the “independent libraries,” but nothing came of this effort. In 2006, the national library associations of Latvia and Lithuania passed support resolutions, but the Lithuanian association later retracted its resolution after learning the complete story. Robert Kent also tried to convince the Hungarian library association to pass a similar resolution but without result.⁵⁰ This author also personally saw Kent’s messages at the Oslo meeting on the IFLA message board to the delegations of more countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Friends of Cuban Libraries Last Try

Three ALA councilors brought another resolution in support of the “independent librarians” to the 2008 Annual Conference in Anaheim. However two of them were first time councilors who like Anthony Lewis really did not know much about the issue. In fact, it seemed that all new councilors were contacted that year by Mr. Kent and his supporters. The new councilors soon learned more about how they were being used, and withdrew their support. That left the resolution without a seconder, and it could not be introduced at the Council. Peter McDonald, Chair of the ALA Resolutions Committee, provided the necessary backstory at a meeting of the Council Forum. McDonald also exposed Steve Marquardt’s dirty tricks on the Council floor. In a particularly nasty move, ALA member and purported Amnesty International Legislative Coordinator for Minnesota, Steve Marquardt had created a “version 2.0” of Michael Dowling’s “Cuba Update for ALA Annual 2008” report inserting much information favorable to the “independent librarians.” However, he did not put his name on the first page, but only on the last page of this long document, making it seem that this version also came from Michael Dowling. He then

emailed it to all the councilors making the message appear to come from ALA. As director of the ALA International Relations Office, Dowling was not amused. After being admonished, Marquardt issued “version 2.1” with his name at the top. This clearly stepped over a line and the Council was clearly fed up with the supporters of dirty tricks in Cuba and now in the United States.⁵¹

The last action of Friends of Cuban Libraries appears to have been at a 2011 conference on “Cuban Futures” held at the City University of New York Graduate Center where Rhonda Neugebauer and Dana Lubow gave a talk on a project to send a bookmobile stocked with books for the US to public libraries in Granma Province. According to a hostile article published by Friends of Cuban Libraries, one of their members challenged the two presenters on their depiction of the situation of Cuban libraries and their analysis of the so-called “independent library movement.” The last posting under “Recent News” on the organization’s website was dated Oct. 7, 2011.⁵²

Conclusion

The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) is the most well-known and financed Cuban exile organization in Miami. CANF has been a staunch supporter of efforts to tighten the US embargo and to subvert the Cuban government. It is instructive to consider their evaluation of the use of funds allocated under the Helms-Burton Act. In a March 2008 report, they declared the US government program

...**utterly ineffective** due to restrictive institutional policies and lack of oversight and accountability of grantee recipients within the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the primary U.S. government agency tasked with distributing democracy funding⁵³ [emphasis added].

The report states that a significant majority of the funds were actually spent by (so-called) non-profit agencies for their operating expenses. It gives examples of four US-based NGOs: the first spent only 19% of its US government funding in Cuba, the second only 4%, the third 81%, and the last 27%. The report stated that the agencies had to ship in all their supplies at ten times the cost compared to if they bought them on the local Cuban market.⁵⁴ From all available accounts, it seems that the Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba have also been utterly ineffective inside Cuba. Several US and international visits to these homes have shown lack of awareness of their existence in their own neighborhoods, little traffic, and little use of the small collections.

Furthermore, it is illegal under US, Cuban, and international law to secretly finance domestic opposition in another sovereign nation. For example see 18 US Code § 951 - Agents of foreign governments:

(a) Whoever, other than a diplomatic or consular officer or attache, acts in the United States as an agent of a foreign government without prior notification to the Attorney General if required in subsection (b), shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than ten years, or both.

(b) The Attorney General shall promulgate rules and regulations establishing requirements for notification.

If a similar law was strictly applied in Cuba, the vast majority of Cuban dissidents would be in jail. There are similar provisions in French, Spanish, Belgian, Italian, Swiss, and Swedish law.⁵⁵

Although ineffective in Cuba, Helms-Burton funding has been quite successful domestically. US propaganda against Cuba is nothing new and has been going on for years. The demonization of Cuba has been widespread and has pervaded the mainstream media, so not surprisingly most Americans have been easily taken in. Given the US environment, it is remarkable that SRRT was able to counter the propaganda campaign and prevent the ALA Council from falling into the USAID and State Department's trap. Ann Sparanese especially deserves a great deal of credit for her tireless efforts in educating the Council. Friends of Cuban Libraries has been thoroughly discredited, and it has seemingly disappeared.

Perhaps the emerging political, economic, and cultural thaw, exemplified by the opening of embassies on 20 July 2015, and the meetings between Presidents Raul Castro and Barack Obama will have wide ranging positive effects. But there is also a threat that this political thaw may bring foreign subversion of a different sort that can gradually undermine the gains of the Cuban Revolution. The hope is that the new cooperative movement will transform state enterprises into the engine that will jump-start the economy while remaining true to revolutionary principles.⁵⁶ In the meantime, small private businesses are flourishing.

The US and Cuba have created a bilateral commission to coordinate the further normalization of relations concerning migration, illegal drugs, law enforcement, human rights, property claims presumably including Guantánamo Bay, and probably US destabilization activities. New regulations allow US telecommunications and Internet corporations to operate in Cuba, and US debit cards can now be used in Cuban hotels and restaurants. Direct mail has been established, and an environmental accord has been signed. One of the most far-reaching changes is allowing Cuban access to the US banking system. But all this has been done by executive orders, and only the Congress can rescind the trade embargo. Furthermore a new US president could reverse any of these accomplishments.

And we are now seeing a swing in US public opinion because of the thaw. Many more people from the US are already travelling to Cuba due to Obama's

lifting of most of the travel restrictions. They are seeing a different reality than has been depicted in the US mainstream media for so many years. This will increase in fall 2016 when direct commercial flights between the US and Cuba will be initiated.

The Cuban Revolution has made an enormous difference in the lives of the great majority of the people, especially in education, health care, race relations, and the eradication of poverty. On these points, it is clearly miles ahead of its peers. This author finds their accomplishments in combatting racism particularly noteworthy, although there is always more to do.

But the US obsession with overthrowing the Cuban Revolution has had a major impact on freedom of speech and the press. The examples of the 1973 US-backed overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile, the invasions of Grenada (1982) and Panama (1989) and many other covert US operations to destabilize other governments throughout history show that Cuba had no choice but to do everything to prevent a US coup. In this new situation it will be interesting to see how Cuba will restructure its information and communications policies, including dealing with the US corporations itching to make new profits.

SRRT's ability to expose US foreign policy towards Cuba has made it possible for ALA to establish a respectful relationship with ASCUBI and many Cuban librarians. In the process, SRRT has also educated many US librarians about US foreign policy. It is a remarkable achievement, and something to build upon for the future.

NOTES

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- 2 *SRRT Newsletter*, no. 92, (June 1989): 5.
- 3 1986 CD #40, Annual.
- 4 "Resolution on the IFLA Conference in Havana, Cuba," *SRRT Newsletter*, no. 109 (September 1993): 3.
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- 6 *SRRT Newsletter*, no. 117, (September 1995): 7.
- 7 <http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/libertad.pdf>
- 8 Memo from Ann C. Sparanese, SRRT Action Councilor to Pat Wand, Chairperson, ALA IRC Latin American & Caribbean Subcommittee, January 8, 2001, page 2,

- unpublished. This long memo was produced for the Committee's hearing on the charges by Friends of Cuban Libraries. It gives much background material on the group and related organizations. Robert Kent was also exposed in Diana Barohona, "Librarians as Spooks: The Scheme to Infiltrate Cuba's Libraries," *Counterpunch*, June 18-20, 2005, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2005/06/18/the-scheme-to-infiltrate-cuba-s-libraries/>; and Aleida Godánez Soler, "The Independent Libraries: An Organized Lie," *Trabajadores*, June 21, 2005, no longer online. Soler was a Cuban security agent who infiltrated the so-called independent librarians.
- 9 "Independent Libraries in Cuba," IFLA/FAIFE Report on Cuba/1999 (with 2 annexes), <http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/faife/cubarepo.pdf>.
 - 10 These resolutions are unpublished. The 1994 resolution included a UK cooperative agreement with ASCUBI (Cuban Library Association), material aid to Cuban libraries, and twinning initiatives between UK and Cuban libraries.
 - 11 John Pateman to Al Kagan, email 7 June 2010.
 - 12 "Resolution on Cuban Libraries," *SRRT Newsletter*, no. 134 (June 2000): 4-5.
 - 13 Rhonda L. Neugebauer, "Cuban Libraries Revisited: One Year later," *International Leads*, 15, no. 3 (September 2001): 1-2, 8.; and Rhonda L. Neugebauer, "Report on Cuban Libraries," email to SRRTAC-L and PLGNET-L, June 21, 2000.
 - 14 <http://www.friendsofcubanlibraries.org/FAQs.htm#Who%20Are%20the%20Friends%20of%20Cuban%20Libraries>
 - 15 The brochure was titled, *Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba: Una Alternativa Cultural para el Pueblo Cubano*. The poster and foldout pamphlet were both titled, *Faces of Liberty: Censorship-Free Reading* (Miami: Friends of Cuban Libraries, n.d.). Their website no longer exists. See Michael Dowling (Director, ALA International Relations Office), "Cuba Update for ALA Annual 2008," unpublished. ALA's FOIA request was unanswered at the time of the 2008 IRC report. See Ramon Humerto Colás, *Testimony before the Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC, April 16, 2003* (Washington, DC: Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba, [2003]), 4.
 - 16 Philip Agee, "Terrorism and Civil Society as Instruments of U.S. Policy in Cuba," Adapted from Agee lectures for International Workshops for Peace to be held at the Cuban Peace Movement in Havana, May-October 2003, <http://www.cubalinda.com/English/Groups/TerrorismandCivilSociety.htm>.
 - 17 *Cuba: Essential Measures?: Human Rights Crackdown in the Name of Security* (London: Amnesty International, 2003). The numbers do not add up because of overlapping designations. See also *Cuba – Prisoners of Conscience: 71 Longing for Freedom* (London: Amnesty International, 2005). 14 of the 75 were released in 2004 and early 2005 according to Amnesty International.
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- 21 Charlotte Allen, "It's Always 1984 in Cuba," *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 2003; Duncan Currie, "The Forgotten 14: The American Library Association Embraces Castro," *National Review*, July 28, 2003.
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- 26 Carol Cositore, "The Independent Journalists of Cuba: Not Independent, Not Journalists, and Are, or Want to Be of the United States," *Prensa Latina*, <http://soc.culture.venezuela.narkive.com/m2a6Hs8V/the-independent-journalists-of-cuba-not-independent-not-journalists>.
- 27 Nancy San Martin, "Dissident Seeks Movement 'Free of Foreign Influence,'" *Miami Herald*, June 15, 2004, <http://www.cubanet.org/htdocs/CNews/y04/jul04/16e5.htm>.
- 28 "Report on Cuban Issue," American Library Association, International Relations Committee, Latin American and Caribbean Subcommittee, January 15, 2001, unpublished. (2000-2001 CD#18.1).
- 29 Jordan M. Scepanski, Chair, International Relations Committee, "International Relations Committee Report," unpublished (2000-2001 CD#18).
- 30 John W. Berry, ALA President-elect, "Report of Visit to ACURIL XXXI and its Host Country, Cuba, May 23 – May 30, 2001," June 11, 2001 and revised July 13, 2001, unpublished. For more on visits to the so-called independent libraries, see "Cuban Library Support Group, Discussion Paper no. 1." It contains reports by John Pateman, Rhonda L. Neugebauer, and Larry R. Oberg. It was published in 2001, but the year does not appear on the publication. It came with a cover that implied that it was an issue of *Information for Social Change*, however it does not appear on the Information for Social Change website. For another full report including visits to "over a dozen" so-called independent libraries, see Rhonda L. Neugebauer, "Payment for Services Rendered": US-funded Dissent and the "Independent Libraries Project" in Cuba," Presentation to the Pacific Coast Council on Latin American Studies Nov. 8-9, 2002; East Los Angeles College; Panel "Cuba Today," <http://www.cubalinda.com/English/Groups/RhondaNeugebauer.htm>. This report was also published in *World Libraries*, 13, no. 1 & 2 (Spring & Fall 2003), http://chrisdaydesign.com/worldlib/vol13no1-2/neugebauer_v13n1-2.shtml.
- 31 "Resolution on Access to Information by Cuba's Libraries," June 2001, no longer online.
- 32 "International Relations Committee and Intellectual Freedom Committee's Report on Cuba (2003-2004" (ALA CD#18.1), unpublished; *SRRT Newsletter*, no. 136

- (September 2001): 7; no. 137 (December 2001): 10; no. 146/147 (June 2004): 5-6.
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- 34 ALA Council minutes, June 2003, unpublished.
- 35 Al Kagan represented the SRRT position on the task force.
- 36 "International Relations Committee and Intellectual Freedom Committee's Report on Cuba," (2003-2004 ALA CD# 18.1), <http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=News&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=53695>
- 37 Resolution 5, 2003 Resolutions of the 58th Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Library Association, Toronto, Ontario, June 23, 2003, 7/23/03, <http://www.cla.ca/Content/NavigationMenu/AboutCLA/Governance/AnnualGeneralMeetings/AGM2003/default.htm>. The resolution was moved by Brian Campbell and seconded by Martin Dowding. Campbell distributed an information sheet at the meeting titled, "Independent' Libraries and Cuba," unpublished.
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