



Introduction

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FOR MORE THAN TWO DECADES, librarians in the United States and Canada, and to varying degrees in other Western and English-speaking countries, have had a deepening concern for the maintenance of intellectual freedom, and, indeed, for an extension and broadening of that freedom. But, although the public and official stands taken by librarians in defense of freedom have received considerable acclaim (with notable dissents from some who believe this has given comfort to the forces of indecency or to dubious political positions), many librarians themselves are far from satisfied that the principles of freedom are being given the kind of wholehearted and effective support that is demanded in these times.

The first report by the American Library Association's Committee for New Directions, presented to the association in January of 1970, gives first priority to concerns for intellectual freedom. It stresses though—and this is of particular significance—the need for a more aggressive position by the ALA in supporting librarians whose positions are threatened by conflicts with governing officials over intellectual freedom issues. It urges a more forthright declaration of concern for social issues in American society and for a more direct involvement of the association in efforts to correct social and political injustices and imbalances. It asks that greater attention be given to problems of censorship and the freedom to read—particularly as these affect the freedom of individual librarians to take clear positions on issues of censorship without suffering penalties or risking their livelihood.

How far the concerns for intellectual freedom should be extended to taking official positions on such matters by the library associations (national, state and regional) is a matter of much controversy at this moment. David K. Berninghausen's chapter in this issue looks usefully

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into this matter; and by the time the issue appears the ALA will have met again in annual conference and will doubtless have experienced further wide-ranging and strenuous debates on the subject.

Perhaps, then, this issue of *Library Trends* comes at a propitious time. Not that its several contributions will be able to offer direct answers to such questions as those with which ALA is at present struggling, for that is not its intent. It may seem to some that it does not give adequate voice to the newer forces in the profession who are pressing for a deeper "official" commitment to the acceptance of social responsibilities. The intent of the issue is, however, to consider where we stand on the matter of the freedom to read, on access to libraries in pursuit of knowledge and in enjoyment of literature and the arts. It is concerned with the ever-present threat of censorship and the restriction of the freedoms guaranteed under the United States Constitution, or similarly acknowledged by other peoples through their governments or through such expressions as that of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1946, which stated that freedom of information is a fundamental human right.

Several of the opening chapters deal with the history of our concerns for intellectual freedom and our growing involvement in efforts to defend it. Robert B. Downs provides a valuable review of the development of the concept as basic in our society. No one has spoken more wisely and more effectively to us about our obligations to defend freedom of speech and the press than Downs. He has been our most eloquent spokesman in interpreting the responsibilities of librarians for maintaining free libraries and a climate for freedom of thought.

Concerning that "climate" in which freedom will flourish, Ervin J. Gaines surmises that it is better now than it was even so recently as the late 1950s, but he shows that attitudes of the American public still are dominantly cautious and quite conservative with respect to expressions of the "new morality." Librarians who open their shelves to publications that appeal to independent readers, young and old, and which indeed reflect the rapidly changing scene in America and other parts of the world should not be surprised if certain solid citizens of the community show reluctance to accept such expressions.

A commitment to intellectual freedom, though voiced in a great many ways, is clearly central to our idea of free libraries—of libraries to which all members of our society should have free access. Implicit is the idea that librarians have a solemn responsibility to preserve this freedom to read and to oppose actively any effort to limit it. "Freedom

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of access" may be interpreted broadly, so as to require consideration of the many ways in which it can be assured, and, in concrete terms, the several ways in which it may be denied or in which the principle becomes diluted. Hoyt R. Galvin throws light on some of the barriers that impede free access and suggests means for reaching and serving "the unreached" with library service.

Ann Ginger and Celeste MacLeod, who look into the question of people's rights to understand the law as it affects their lives, are concerned that little or nothing is done to teach the fundamentals of law in our schools, and that they fail therefore to provide access to ideas about freedom. They believe that librarians can perform an important service by helping people to know their rights and by providing information about them. They refute the generally accepted position that librarians should maintain a completely passive or "neutral" attitude toward assisting people in understanding the law. They suggest that to keep the law a secret is less than a service to people in need of help. "Librarians," they say, "can make a valuable contribution by helping lawyers who are working to have social questions decided peacefully and by reason and due process in the legislative halls, administrative agencies, and courtrooms. These lawyers need the legal materials that librarians can provide." Their implication is plain that the librarian's concern for people's social needs should be considerably broader than is generally conceded.

The position of the library's "governing body" concerning issues of free speech, free access, and the maintenance of the library's independence in selection and in pursuing useful community programs is of critical importance. Alex P. Allain in his chapter stresses that the obligation which trustees have to their community precludes imposing their own prejudices, preferences, or views when issues of freedom are faced. Whatever the governing body—whether trustees or commissioners or regents, and whether they hold authority over public, college or university libraries—the obligation to defend intellectual freedom or academic freedom is the same. If such governing authorities tend to adhere so closely to positions of preserving established modes of thought or of resisting change or fresh viewpoints, they may then stand in opposition to the librarian whose professional responsibility it is to interpret and make effective an institution's principles of selection and expression. As Allain suggests, this will not happen if governing authorities remember that they "are there to protect the librarian and to back him."

An important chapter in our struggle for a free press is recounted by Eli M. Oboler in "Congress as Censor." Oboler, who can take a long view of such matters, is concerned not only to tell of efforts in our darker past to "keep America pure." He shows that Congress today is sure to respond to strong waves of feeling by people "back home" who are disturbed by what they consider to be the threat of obscene literature and art (including the movies, of course) or of subversive ideas. With Gaines, he reminds us that the great majority of Americans—silent or otherwise—are not ready to abandon their rather conservative standards of personal morality, absurd as they may seem to many of the young people of our "now" generation.

This brings us to a consideration of what the law and the courts have to say concerning free speech and free expression. Stanley Fleishman offers the sobering reminder that the Supreme Court has not solved the problem of defining obscenity—the obscenity law being, in his words, a "constitutional disaster area." We labor, he says, under a vagueness of standards and the difficulty of applying them to particular material. Justice Warren Burger's advocacy of stricter local controls over fleshy movies and sexy printed materials may portend a trend for the future, he suggests, and he cites a *Wall Street Journal* prediction in support of this.

To what extent, John J. Farley asks, is the adolescent entitled to freedom of the intellect? This is unquestionably one of the most difficult questions we face, and Farley speaks with effect of "the tension that results from the American society's lip-service to the ideal of the totally free marketplace of ideas as opposed to the practical reality." Intellectual freedom seems never to have been generally accepted in the United States, he observes. He foresees, not unhelpfully, an end to enforced protection of adolescents from books that might harm; but the complexities will remain, he believes, with a continuing tension between the adolescent and his elders.

Frequently asked by those who search for first causes is the question as to what rights a man actually has to make his thoughts or ideas known. Are we really free to publish and be published? In his chapter on "The Behemoths and the Book Publishers," William R. Eshelman considers the mergers, consolidations, regroupings, absorptions, and other mutations that have occurred in the publishing world in recent years, and assesses their effect on the state of our freedom to read, to learn, and to enjoy. The issue editor assigned him one of the most difficult and baffling of subjects to explore, and is pleased by what came forth.

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One of the hazards in putting together such an issue as this is in setting reasonable bounds to the scope of the study. To limit consideration of intellectual freedom to the situation in the United States and Canada would be a natural approach, but obviously narrow and parochial. This is as far as we usually try to go as we discuss such matters among ourselves. To try to extend it to the rest of the world, though, would be to attempt the impossible within the limits of a *Library Trends* issue. Much study and research is needed to help us overcome our ignorance on these matters. The solution attempted here has been to look mainly at certain other parts of the English-speaking world, to the countries of Western Europe with which our cultural and institutional ties have been close, and to the troubled country of South Africa, some of whose social problems are comparable, if not always similar, to ours.

Robert Collison, former Librarian of the British Broadcasting Corporation, has, therefore, been asked to review the situation in Western Europe, noting in particular the currently fascinating phenomenon of a decontrolled Denmark. Jean P. Whyte and Geoffrey T. Alley speak with valuable firsthand knowledge and experience of matters in Australia and New Zealand. Douglas H. Varley is able to view the situation in South Africa from his present vantage point in England, where he has lived for the past four years. Though Varley can perhaps speak more freely now than he once could about matters of intellectual freedom, it will be seen that he wrote forthrightly on library censorship, for publication in South Africa, as long ago as 1954.

Rounding out the issue are chapters that look to a better education of ourselves in the issues of freedom. LeRoy C. Merritt, whose untimely death occurred while this issue was in press, was himself faithfully engaged in bring information to the library world about the never-ending struggle for true intellectual freedom. He was in the best position to tell about what others have done and are trying to do to report and interpret the current scene. Kenneth F. Kister has pioneered in teaching a full-scale course on intellectual freedom and censorship, and can speak usefully of his own experience and of a number of other efforts now being made to provide better-informed librarians for tomorrow's battles.

If the issue, in sum, appears to offer a series of spot checks on the state of our library freedoms here and abroad, and of our own strengths and weaknesses as librarians in the war on ignorance and unreason, the editor acknowledges that it is, in fact, just that.