

Stirrings in Missouri: A State Association Meets

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# Stirrings in Missouri

## A State Association Meets

After two days of formal programming plus listening to the still-organizing Social Responsibilities Round Table and to Nat Hentoff, the membership, packed full of rumor and tales of confrontation, gathered in the Ramada Inn at the state capital, Jefferson City, for their annual membership meeting. John Herbst presided as President. Reports were the first order of business. Mrs. Helen Kreigh, newly appointed executive director of the association told of her part time activities. James Leathers, soon-to-be president, reported on his investigation that showed that less than 10 per cent of the available income from intangibles taxes is being collected in Missouri (the tax is the base for library support).

Reports revealed that the college and research library group was preparing a position paper on academic status which would be ready for Spring ratification. The school librarians and the public librarians called for restructuring of the association. The school librarians asked that the nominating committee be formed of a representative from each of the association's units. They also asked for a rewrite on the Constitution. The public library division recommended a reorganization committee composed of one member elected from each division (Miss Syd Shinn, state library consultant, had already been elected to represent the public librarians); two members elected from the Junior Members Round Table; and one past president appointed by the incumbent president. A member from the Children's Services Round Table was added to the committee from the floor. The plans for reorganization are to be presented at the next

annual meeting.

### Overthrow traditional nomination

Mrs. Leola Miller of Rolla Public Library had been placed on the ballot by the nomination committee as the sole candidate for the office of president-elect. The school librarians took to the floor and placed Mrs. Marine (Marty) Neal, superintendent of school libraries in Kansas City, on the ballot. This was apparently the first time in memory that opposition had come to the nomination committee selections and a parliamentary hassle took place. Certain members were prepared, however, with pre-printed ballots and the vote was taken and tallied. The school librarian won.

The *MLA Quarterly*, 1969 winner of the H. W. Wilson periodical award, was suspended as being too expensive an item for an association struggling with the cost of establishing executive offices. A newsletter will be published while exploration is made on a possible regional journal in cooperation with other state associations.

The constitution was amended to restrict members to one office or committee appointment per year.

Joan Goddard of the Social Responsibilities Round Table introduced three resolutions that were presented to the membership for action. 1) A reaffirmation of the membership charge to the Intellectual Freedom Committee calling for a clipping service in the area of intellectual freedom, directing the committee to contact principals involved to gather information and inform those involved of resources available to them and to make a report to the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom. 2) Ordered the officers

of the Association to make recommendations to the Governor on vacancies on the Library Commission. 3) Endorsed the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom proposal for the Freedom to Read Foundation and the interim National Freedom Fund for Librarians. All resolutions passed.

### Joan Bodger incident

A printed statement with over twenty signatures had been presented to the Missouri State Library Commission earlier in the day. It was reprinted and distributed at the membership meeting calling for a detailed report to the members at the meeting. "We are not interested in placing blame, but only in acquiring fact. We feel that there are basic relationships between a librarian and his board of trustees involved here and it is important that they be discussed." The petition went on to ask that the Commission make public their minutes stating that it would assist "in informing Missouri citizens of Commission policies." Mrs. Jerome Duggan, chairman of the state commission, took the floor and asked that Ralph Parker, University of Missouri librarian and dean of the Library School who is a member of the Commission, be allowed to answer the petition which had challenged the integrity of the Commission. His statement follows:

Members of MLA, I have been a member of the Missouri Library Commission and of its predecessor organization the Missouri State Library Advisory Board for almost twenty-three years. The situation which arose last March and April was the most trying that I have ever been faced with. Unlike other members of the Commission, I am there by law. The only way I could leave the job was to resign from my job as librarian at the University of Missouri. I had asked to be relieved of that job and I am very happy that a successor has been appointed. The meeting which I attended this afternoon is, therefore, the last meeting that I will attend of the Missouri State Library Commission.

There are fads and there are things which people do which (it doesn't matter what the situation is) get labeled and attacked. Among those is any action unfavorable to a member of a minority race, religion, or nationality. Anything that happens that is to the disadvantage of/or against that person is quite likely to be labeled racism regardless of the facts in the

case.

Librarians have become very sensitive to the terms "library censorship" and "intellectual freedom." I have been long, personally, a strong supporter of the activities of the American Library Association Committee on Intellectual Freedom. My training as a journalist leads me as well as my training and experience as a librarian to oppose the suppression of ideas and opinions. This same attitude I am sure is shared by the other members of the State Library Commission; by Mrs. Duggan, who has been serving as president, who is an attorney and as an attorney, is interested in the same kind of thing; Judge Morgett, who has been a tower of strength to libraries local and state; to Mrs. Lilly Steury of Springfield who has been one of the most faithful members of the Missouri Library Association, president of the citizens and trustees division; Mr. Hubert Wheeler, the state commissioner of education. There is at present a vacancy. There are six members but at present there is a vacancy. These five persons are the members presently on the commission. I can vouch for their ardent support of any of the approved statements of Freedom to Read, Library Bill of Rights, or what have you.

The case of Joan Bodger had nothing whatsoever to do with the matters of censorship; libraries; it did not affect the state library in any way in the case that occurred. The idea was taken upon by fellows who would promote Mrs. Bodger's actions as being a case of censorship. The commission never made it explicit in its considerations that it had no objections to Mrs. Bodger's espousal of the Students for a Democratic Society, *Ramparts Magazine*, *New Left Notes*, [and] publications of materials which have been charged by the prosecuting attorney of Boone County as being pornographic and obscene. Mrs. Bodger had every right as an individual citizen to express her opinions. There was never any question of that right.

Let me back up for those of you who are not familiar with the facts; and I got involved in these not as a librarian but as dean of the library school at the University of Missouri. There was an issue over the distribution from the student union of certain material which the university said was of such a nature that the university wished not to put its stamp of approval by being distributed from the ticket window of the student union. A day or so later, copies of this material that had been objected to by the university was reprinted in a publication called *Free Press Underground*. This was offered for sale on the sidewalks in front of the student union, not on university property but on city property. Shortly after the beginning of the sale of this material, the local police arrested the four students involved

and charged them with violation of a specific statute of the state of Missouri.

A day or so after this, a letter was written by Mrs. Bodger on the State Library Commission letterhead which contained my name and the names of the four other members which I have given you, and was signed by her as children's library consultant. This letter made an attack upon the University of Missouri for suppression of the publication and for the arrest of the students involved. The University of Missouri had nothing whatsoever to do with the arrest of the individuals involved. The University of Missouri did not approve but it did not take any action to prevent the sale of the publication on the public streets; yet the letter from Mrs. Bodger took the university to task and was, in the letter, accusing the university of censorship, suppression, and so on.

This created a certain amount of objection from certain elements within the state who have been damned by those who were in favor of the actions of the students as being by a bunch of right-wing birchers. Now, I have no more use for the John Birch society than anyone else. I don't think that the people who raised the furor were members of the John Birch Society, certainly not all of them.

The Commission was bombarded with letters. As soon as possible, the Commission called a meeting to consider the matter. In the course of the consideration, and actually before the Commission had been able to meet, there were published reports that Mrs. Bodger had been given permission by her superior, Mr. O'Halloran, the state librarian, to send the letter. The Commission met for a total of eleven hours on two separate occasions about a week apart to consider what could be done. The action at that time consisted of a very mild slap on the wrist to Mr. O'Halloran stating that it was a case of poor judgment for one state official, the head of one state agency to attack publicly the activities of another state agency, the University of Missouri. At this point that was all that was done. That's all that happened in the commission. There was a lot of talk, a lot of argument, a great deal of soul searching.

We wanted to protect the state library against the political reaction which we were sure was going to take place, and it took place. The state library is suffering today from low appropriations because of this act of indiscretion. But the damage had already been done, there was nothing we could do but to suffer the consequences.

A few days later Mrs. Bodger was involved in a number of speaking engagements throughout this state on a project on which she was working and she appeared at a library in St. Charles County. This occurred on, I think it was Good Friday. It was early in April. When she appeared at this library, there was a picket

line of P.T.A. members or some parent's organization in protest against Mrs. Bodger's appearance. Mr. O'Halloran on Monday (it may have been Saturday I'm not sure of the exact date) suggested that because of the violent reaction in the St. Charles County, it was not to the best interest of the state library and to the library program, he thought, it would be best to suspend the two or three future meetings which had been scheduled. Mrs. Bodger then drafted a letter of resignation and I'm a little confused here on the exact sequence of events; but instead of simply being willing to turn in a letter of resignation and let it go through the normal course, she felt called upon to call up Mrs. Duggan and speak to her on the phone. Mrs. Duggan, who did not know and had never seen Mrs. Bodger in the whole time, tried to avoid any conversation. And if it's one way, I guess there was conversation, because Mrs. Duggan said nothing. But she was harangued with foul and filthy language the result of which was that the Commission voted not to accept her resignation, but terminated her services.

What would you have done under such circumstances? There was never any question about whether the material belonged in the library. I think it should not be in a children's collection. But, that was not the issue. There was no issue at the University of Missouri relating to the library. I was told by the chancellor at the University of Missouri, he said, "Ralph, I know you've got that stuff, we're buying it from all over the country but we don't flaunt it in the face of people." And this was a case of poor judgment. The bad judgment was all there was until the violent reaction which took place. Should the Commission have said nothing . . . nothing?

There has been published in the *ALA Bulletin* a supposedly factual report on this case. There was an editorial from the editor of the *ALA Bulletin*. There was also a report in the *Library Journal*. Neither of these articles had any authorship shown. They were published as factual information. I do not know who wrote them, who sent the information, but I do know that not one single member of the Commission was ever interrogated regarding the incident. No member of the Intellectual Freedom Committee of the Missouri Library Association ever said one word or inquired of the State Library Commission regarding its activities until this petition, signed by twenty-four people, present here, was presented to the Commission this afternoon.

How do you answer the half-truths and the lies which were offered by protagonists of Mrs. Bodger and accepted simply because someone put the tag of censorship on it. I debated for a long time should some answer be made, some answer to the published historical record? I

didn't know how it could be done. The Commission discussed this at length this afternoon and reluctantly made the decision that the committee who drafted this resolution, if they are sincere, were entitled to this explanation. If they are sincere, they will accept it. If not, there is no need to say anything more. Thank you.

At the conclusion of Dr. Parker's statement there was a standing ovation and the meeting was adjourned. William DeJohn, of the state library staff and nationally known as chairman of ALA's Social Responsibilities Round Table took to the podium in rebuttal. He reaffirmed that there was no desire on the part of the membership for a witch hunt. "The Association fell down," he said. "We have got to be very certain in the future of just what we are doing and we have got to have information in order to do it." He said that there were no real guidelines or standards in determining cases of intellectual freedom.

"We are going to have other situations come up that we are going to have to decide on whether or not it is one of these cases," he concluded. "Someone has to come up with a decision. Someone has to stand up to be counted and ask for some facts. We didn't do that last Spring. And we better be sure we do it the next time it happens." There was a smattering of applause.

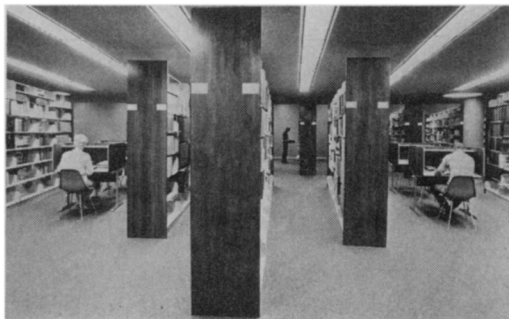
A lead editorial appeared in the Jefferson City *Post Tribune* on October 7, 1969, under the heading "MU Official Blunts Library 'Activists'." The editorial pointed out that "Despite MCL's relatively wise handling of this case, Missourians have cause for concern over the outlook of some public librarians around the state." It went on to label the National Freedom Fund for Librarians as an "obvious move to create a 'fund' to cushion financial losses of library 'activists' who may run into trouble." The editorial concluded that the tax payers "who foot the salaries of librarians and library operations throughout the state" would not support librarians as social activists.—GRS.

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