

"A think piece for Luddite librarians . . ."

Let It All Hang Out

by SANFORD BERMAN

IF ANYBODY really loves libraries today, it must be the power companies and electronics industry, for we gleefully purchase, so it seems, almost anything that plugs in, flashes, bleeps, or hums. There are the giant computers, some of which occasionally spew out—at enormous cost—cumbersome, promptly outdated lists of serial holdings, or the siren-activating, turnstile-locking detection systems to encourage pilferers to reach new levels of sophistication.

Bright young circuitry-men and information-retrievers speak enchantedly about their programs and machines as if these were inestimable *ends* in themselves. Research, teaching, and development money appears increasingly directed to mechanical gimmickry. Despite all the lofty talk about "social responsibility," the electric socket seems to enjoy progressively more dollars-and-cents attention than the flesh-and-blood reader. Librarianship, of course, is not unique in this. In the nation itself (let alone the world), about a third of the populace, including 5,000,000 aged, the "old folks" who safely and devotedly squired many of us through wars and depression, is under-fed and underhoused. Yet national resources are overwhelmingly channeled into either an expensive, circus-like, ego-tripping space-race or to pacify the uppity, ungrateful "natives" of Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Experts acknowledge that the delivery system for medical care verges on a breakdown, that only the fortunate fraction of our citizenry who can pay for it receive full medical attention. Yet "medical" funding for esoteric research and gadgetry, together with frenzied "empire building"—both unrelated to immediate human needs—escalate, while federal grants for cancer study have declined.

Unemployment is chronic, presently exceeding six percent of the employable. (Sweden, as a comparative example, proclaims a national crisis when this figure approaches two percent.) Yet job-killing automation continues unabated, and necessary, job-generating social projects remain unbegun. Our environment nears catastrophe. Yet the very corporate interests who profit from junk production, blissfully pollute the atmosphere, and haphazardly alienate the land suffer only polite knuckle-rappings—for they bulwark the whole politico-economic structure.

A classical Luddite might indiscriminately damn *all* the multiplying soft- and hardware. But that would be foolishly naive, sentimental, Utopian. The age of cottage industry and idyllic agriculture is past. And that many library-related machines perform essential, service-improving tasks cannot be challenged. (Indeed, the warmly welcome *Alternative Press Index* owes its existence to a computer. So does the annual *Periodicals in East African Libraries*, which vastly facilitates interlibrary borrowing among a number of otherwise isolated, "developing" institutions.) Still, the suspicion grows that an untouchable elite is developing within the profession: a coalition of technocrats and bureaucrats dedicated—even if somewhat unwittingly—to making themselves indispensable by virtue of their ability to manipulate and expand the "new technology" plus the more complicated administrative-budgetary apparatus associated with it. If many colleagues share this suspicion, it might be well to profoundly re-assess our fundamental attitudes and priorities before things get totally out of hand.

To what extent, for instance, may super-mechanization of libraries—and its all too likely depersonalization of services—actually "turn off" current and potential users, many of whom want little more than access to the books, magazines, and nonprint items that will satisfy their personal interests and curi-

osity, and who "dig" the opportunity to rap at leisure with another sensitive, literate, helpful person? (Should this sound preposterously old-fashioned, undertake a simple experiment: Try rapping with a teaching machine or microfilm reader. It's a frustrating experience, certainly less pleasurable than discourse with a live, albeit imperfect, human. One fellow's encounter with a talking cigarette-automat a few years ago in Germany proved completely lopsided. The contraption never stopped its own guttural rumbling long enough to understand that, since no weed packet had been ejected, the would-be smoker only wanted his Deutsch-Mark back.)

To what extent might library automation contribute to worsening unemployment? Or has already done so? Is it considered as a factor in deciding whether to install new machinery or systems that such "innovations" may permanently displace or eliminate some of the library labor force? Even acknowledging "efficiency" and cost reduction *per se* as cardinal elements in our Western, industrial mythology, may it not be socially irresponsible to heartily embrace labor-saving devices that will unconscionably dump people into an economy ill-prepared to ensure them a decent livelihood (not to mention soul satisfying work)? Or, on the positive side, have we sufficiently explored the possibility, for instance, of hiring capable, unemployed youths and senior citizens to perform exit-checks instead of relying upon magnetic fields that don't have to pay rent or buy bread?

To what extent may the mounting emphasis on technology impose inflexibility on many of our operations and, further, permit or dictate certain regressive policies? To illustrate: Reform of obsolete or offensive subject headings has been opposed in some places not because such reform is itself unwarranted, but rather due to a fear that local alterations will not mesh or harmonize with, say, the computerized LC scheme upon which individual institutions may have become dependent. In other words, a library might reluctantly choose to retain the slaver-derived, black-dennounced, ambiguously-assigned head, "Negroes," rather than replace it with the more accurate and patently acceptable terms, "Afro-Americans," "Afro-Brazilians," etc., solely out of an anxiety that to deviate from the computer standard would wreak havoc in its catalog or, correlatively, invite heavy expenditures in changing the centrally provided data on tapes and cards. LC's recently developed music headings have already alarmed several catalogers, who allege that they were constructed not with music and users as the primary foci, but rather to placate the computer. And an ostensibly admirable project like Bell & Howell's micro-package of UPS titles, while a thoughtful and req-

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quisite gift to future generations of scholars, could equally function as a ready-made alibi for subscribing libraries not to stock the inky, perishable—but immensely more enticing and readable—"underground" originals for the benefit of right-now patrons. The unhurried researcher may be content to scan a six-month-old run of *Kaleidoscope* in a quiet, secluded micro-cubicle. Others, however, for whom tabloids like *Kaleidoscope* express vital aspects of their daily life and furnish instantly usable information, want the latest edition as quickly as the library can get it—and are sure to "groove" on it all the more when they can relax with it, perhaps even share it with nearby brethren. The danger, in short, is that of sacrificing immediate reader needs and satisfactions to what is essentially an archival, elitist, long-term objective. (The solution, clearly, is to take *both* media forms, yet the temptation will undoubtedly be to buy the micro-package and then argue that this fulfills the two distinct obligations. The same argument, of course, could be applied to the *New York Times* and *London Times*. But won't be.)

Returning to priorities, to attitudes: Given that any library—and the profession as a whole—has resource limits in labor and funds, how are these resources to be distributed? What projects more urgently demand our money and creative energy than others? It may be—as much of the recent professional literature and agitation suggest—that we have reached a philosophical, if not also spiritual, watershed. Which way do we go? Which side are we on?

Now that gadgetry apostles, administrative autarchs, and those whom Phillip Berrigan has termed "passive robots in the technological waxworks" have probably dismissed most of the foregoing as retrograde nonsense or Leftist cant, let's get to the nitty-gritty:

The libraries we work in, where we get our kicks, where we think we're doing something worthwhile and socially productive, the libraries in which we've invested our training, imagination, adrenalin, and lives, could soon become magnificently irrelevant to ourselves, our society, our world. This is not to predict a sudden apocalypse, only to note a discernible drift.

Much verbiage has been expended on how to become "relevant." Much doubt, however, surrounds the question of whether that verbiage has in fact transformed many attitudes or notably redirected our available resources. All of us suppose that libraries do something valuable, that they have some impact, some effect. (Otherwise, why willfully make a career of librarianship?) Okay. Is that effect in reality benign or malignant? Are we retreating to "safe," static conventionality or moving toward a dynamic involvement with our fast-

changing human and physical milieu? Sure, the answers depend on your values, your *Weltanschauung*. A value judgment can't be escaped, except at the price of outright surrender to external pressures (like Government and its military-industrial puppeteers) or strong, self-propelled internal elements (call them, collectively, the Techno-Bureaucratic Library Establishment). While admittedly an over-simplification, the value problem seems to resolve itself into polar choices: people vs. things, participation vs. pyramidal authority, compassion vs. convenience, engagement vs. neutrality. Were our profession magically transmuted in time and space to Germany of the 1930s, would it be "neutral" about Yellow Stars, Blitzkriegs, KZs, book-burning, forced labor, organization-banning, Gypsy guinea pigs, etc.? Would these events and practices not be regarded as anathema to humane values, to uninhibited scholarship, learning, and dialogue, to the very well-being of our clientele and colleagues? If we rejected "neutrality" under those circumstances, how can we be "neutral" or dispassionate about the American onslaught in Asia (replete with torture, massacre, and charred infants), widespread repression of dissent at home (by means of gun, gavel, computer-bank, and publicly-paid spies), continued subjugation of racial and ethnic minorities (who require no brightly colored, sew-on symbols to identify them), and "criminalization" of our long-haired young (achieved through pot-busts, police-induced "riots," rigid appearance-codes, etc.)? Are these events no less anathema to humane values, to a climate of trust and unfettered dialogue, to a rational distribution of resources? Will the "good Germans" claim that they are not our concern, that war and racism—as outstanding examples—don't affect libraries, or—more cogently—that libraries can exert no influence on them? If we opt for people, participation, compassion, and engagement, there are things to talk about and do. Some, already well-stated—like heightened recruitment and promotion of minority group members; swift, concrete support for the censor's victims; the professional imperative to declare for peace; sanctions against segregated libraries; urging publishers to midwife prejudice-free, interracial books for children; and opposition to governmental prying into patrons' reading habits—need no repeating here. Still others, though, have hardly—if ever—been raised (and fellow "Luddites" can undoubtedly refine these, as well as citing many more):

1. *Outreach*. On the Association level, the one serial publication devoted to servicing outside groups—in this case, labor—has been discontinued. The tragedy in this is not entirely that a useful, horizon stretching newsletter has

folded, but that it was the only such publication to begin with. Not only should the labor vehicle be reinstated, but sister publications are manifestly needed to chronicle, analyze, and assist library services to many more specific groups whose needs are at once pressing and distinctive: Indians, Mexican-Americans, blacks, GLs and draft-age men, women, and the poor. Also, providing it doesn't restrict the mag's independence, money might be allocated to enlarge *Sipapu's* format and circulation so that it becomes an effective catalyst/clearing-house in the slightly chaotic realm of radical and "underground" literature.

The ALA suspension is perhaps ominously symptomatic of the profession's attitude toward innovative "outreach" programs themselves. How many public libraries, for instance, have established (in easy-to-reach locations; e.g., storefronts) special collections of material on welfare rights, the draft, child care, community organizing, and the like—perhaps staffed by local people, with qualified counselors appearing at regularly-scheduled times? Some, to be sure. Indeed, some—like the Free Library of Philadelphia—appear to have wisely harnessed the computer to meet the unmistakable, wide-ranging information requirements of the urban "underprivileged." Some, then. But enough to make a difference, to redress the terrific imbalance between services hesitatingly supplied to low-income ghetto or migrant peoples and those unstintingly offered to Beverly Hills-variety affluents or some far from underprivileged multiversity students now pampered with phone-requested, direct-to-dorm book delivery? Are even the existing programs funded securely enough to guarantee their continuation, or likely to collapse—like so many other highly-touted, "pilot" enterprises—when the voracious military-space moguls decree more rockets and bombs? Has a lobby been mounted to press the Bureau of Indian Affairs to supply pertinent, identity-bolstering library collections, together with wanted bookmobile, oral-history, and other services to the wonderfully neglected "reservations"? Have hitherto submerged elements like street "gangs," junkie communities, and welfare mothers been asked what kind of library service they want? Have well-endowed universities which so painlessly maintain Colleges of Business Administration been pushed to create legal aid and other Goliath-dismembering literature that libraries might then promulgate throughout the inner city? Have library school students been encouraged, perhaps in lieu of theses, to develop reading and media programs for slum-dwellers, farm-worker families, etc.? And has . . . ?

2. *Subject and classification schemes*. Our fundamental "tools of the trade"—Dewey, LC, Sears—in many respects

embody the conceits and wrongheadedness of another era. Far from being the disinterested, universally applicable, and fair-minded schema that an enlightened profession could employ—and disseminate abroad—with pride, they are appallingly marred by pro-Christian bias, Western chauvinism, misogyny, prudery, and WASPish racism; often denigrate the young; defame the sexually unorthodox; and largely underwrite a magisterial, laissez-faire view of economic and social life. In short, they subtly reinforce pernicious stereotypes and questionable, if not untenable, notions concerning humankind. If this judgment seems rash, only examine the Dewey "Religion" schedules; note the DDC equation of "premarital relations" and "homosexuality" with "perversion"; compare the disparate treatment of "Capitalism" and "Socialism" in both Dewey and LC; and then consider—merely as examples—these active LC subject heads, many of which Sears echoes:

LITERATURE, IMMORAL
 ART, IMMORAL
 CHILDREN—MANAGEMENT
 DISCIPLINE OF CHILDREN
 NATIVE RACES (as both a primary and subhead)
 MAMMIES
 JEWISH QUESTION
 RACE QUESTION (as a subhead)
 JEWS AS FARMERS [SCIENTISTS, etc.]
 INDIANS OF NORTH AMERICA, CIVILIZATION OF (i.e., Anglo-Saxon efforts to "civilize" the Indians)
 NEGROES AS BUSINESSMEN [COWBOYS, etc.]
 JAPANESE [CHINESE, MEXICANS, etc.] IN THE U.S. (but never *Americans*)
 WOMEN AS AUTOMOBILE DRIVERS [LIBRARIANS, etc.]
 MANAGEMENT RIGHTS (but no "LABOR RIGHTS")
 YELLOW PERIL
 HOMOSEXUALITY
 XX Sexual Perversion
 LESBIANISM
 XX Sexual Perversion
 CATHOLIC [JEWISH, NEGRO] CRIMINALS (uniquely)
 SABOTAGE
 XX Socialism
 SOCIETY, PRIMITIVE
 ANARCHISM AND ANARCHISTS
 XX Terrorism
 NAPALM
 XX Metallic Soaps (!)
 HEROES (but no "HEROINES")
 PAGANISM
 DISCOVERY AND EXPLORATION (subdivision under "names of continents and countries "discovered" and "explored" by Europeans)
 KAFIRS (i.e., in South African parlance, "niggers")

The situation seems sufficiently alarming to warrant thoroughgoing, critical studies of all the major cataloging tools

and then their urgent revision to accord with modern knowledge, as well as elementary canons of human decency and dignity.

3. *Selection.* If a single keyword or rubric encompasses the multitude of overlapping movements and ideas that within the past decade have forcefully emerged among blacks, students, Jews, teachers, Chicanos, women, the young, Asian-Americans, servicemen, Indians, ecophiliacs, still-colonized peoples, workers, the impoverished, homosexuals, and even some psychiatrists, athletes, retirees, sociologists, and librarians, it is "liberation." The library press and SRRT have suitably reported aspects of this many-faceted "liberation" scene, as well as engendering extensive booklists, bibliographies, and other selection-aids (e.g., *Alternative Books in Print*). The hangup, evidently, lies not with the library press nor SRRT, but rather with libraries. The "liberation" materials have been identified. They can easily be acquired. It is now incumbent upon collection developers to get them—in order, naturally, to document the whole phenomenon for posterity—but even more compellingly to satisfy the contemporary informational needs of "liberation" activists and spectators alike. The multi-pronged "movement" has obviously assumed such proportions that it can no longer be regarded as a temporary fad. (Its roots, in any event, reach deep into the past, and many of its organs have attained a "respectable" longevity.) A library that cannot furnish at least a few appropriate books and magazines, together with knowledgeable advice, to patrons who want material on Gay Liberation, Workers' Control, senior citizen's campaigns for lower transportation rates and higher Social Security benefits, or Third World revolutionary struggles risks becoming utterly useless and pointless to those patrons.

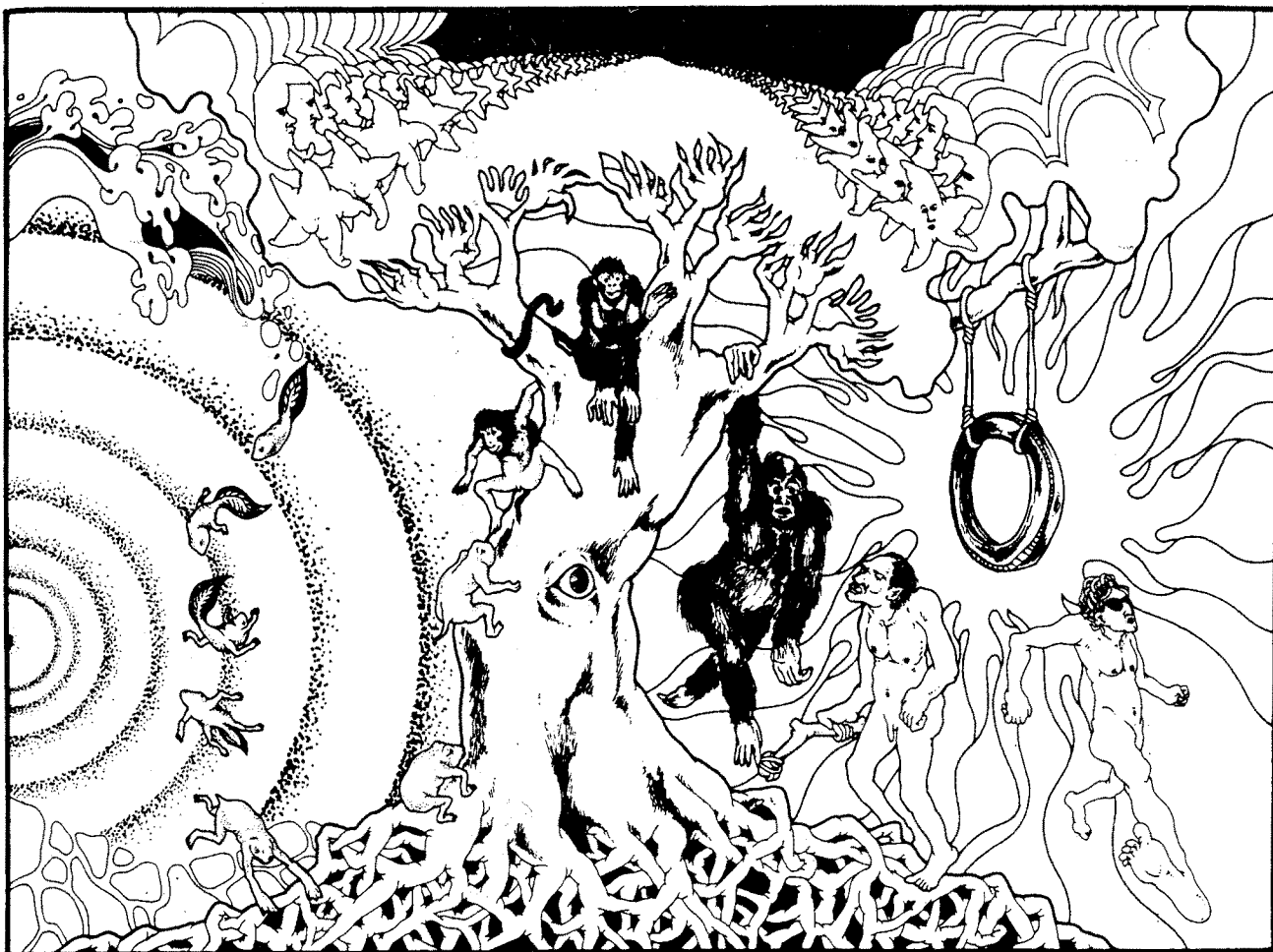
If it's not thought unbecoming nor unusual to lavishly provide directories, newsletters, magazines, and special information services like *Barron's*, *Moody's*, *The Wall Street Transcript*, *Advertising Age*, and *Fortune* for businessmen, investors, and stock market speculators, why flinch at providing even a modest amount of material to "liberationists" who, as equally bona fide members of the community, have no less right to library resources? Further, *LJ*, the *Booklist*, and *Choice* could much enhance the ongoing identification-selection process by more frequently reviewing the books and pamphlets generated by offbeat, "liberationist" presses such as the powerful graphic statements by *L.A. Free Press* cartoonists Ron Cobb and Ed Badajos published respectively by Sawyer and Olympia, *War Incorporated: The Complete Picture of the Congressional-Military-Industrial-University Complex*, and

Autopsy of the A.M.A., an Analysis of American Health Care Delivery Systems, both concocted by Berkeley Student Research Facility, or the Africa Research Group's explosive tract, *The Extended Family*. Also, we need to abandon our condescending, curator-like, rubber-gloves-and-forceps mentality with regard to "alternative" publications. They belong on open shelves, not in glass cases nor padlocked vaults. Students of social problems and current affairs may well find that articles in *Radical America*, *Women*, and *Tricontinental Magazine* are just as fitting and citable for term papers and dissertations as material culled from *Foreign Affairs*, *Time*, and *Business Week*. The oft-enunciated dictum that such matter should only be collected as fodder for the historian, much as intriguing cadavers are gathered and then pickled and frozen for later study by anatomists must be rejected as wholly repugnant species of in-group arrogance.

4. *Participation.* If the boards and committees upon which we increasingly sit have no decision-making power, why sit on them? Without authority to actually enact change or create policy, the activity qualifies as a dreary, spirit-killing charade, a successful management device for co-optation, spawning the illusion that our views and desires really figure in the decision-making calculus. It is altogether too much to expect that libraries will shortly undergo complete democratization, that all employee-strata will soon participate effectively in the decision-making process. But we can sure as hell begin discussing the subject, begin exposing the present shams that pass for "participation," begin devising participative models, and—when sufficient strength and solidarity develop—begin demands for real power-sharing.

5. *Publishing.* Judging from its recent output, ALA appears to regard itself as a scholarly publisher. Some colleagues could certainly produce manuscripts that, while not conforming to a stiff, conventional definition of "scholarship," nonetheless dealt in depth with clearly significant topics and honestly represented dissident, "heretical" opinions not yet accorded book-length treatment. Remarkably few such titles, though, have ever appeared under the ALA imprint. This is not to gainsay the bibliographic and historical value of works, for instance, on Carnegie libraries or German exile publishing in the U.S. It is only to observe that such works seem to constitute the norm, while possible tomes of much greater immediacy—and intellect-stimulating controversy—go unprinted. If ALA Publishing Services haven't so far done so, why not speedily commission:

—a Frommian-Goodmanesque critique of traditionally hierarchic, authoritarian library administration?



A page from "Filipino Food," a book of Ed Badajos' "powerful graphic statements" to be published soon by Olympia Press

—a pro-and-con symposium on library unionism, perhaps including case studies of unions-in-operation and appending a few representative contracts?

—an anthology in which *Synergy*-type "Young Turks" forthrightly rap about the numerous skeletons in our professional closets?

—a collection of all major documents and reports relating to the abolition of "pornography" censorship in Denmark, indicating why and how it came about, together with its results?

—an exploratory study on how libraries—like schools—might become subject to genuine community control, with evidence (if any) from wherever it has actually occurred?

—a women-authored volume—perhaps comparable to E. J. Josey's recent opus dealing with black librarianship—on the historic and current status of women within the profession?

—a survey and discussion of current professional priorities which, among other things, assembles comprehensive budgetary and manpower statis-

tics so we can determine less intuitively in what directions—electronic, "outreach," etc.—we're now travelling?

—a levity-laden tome composed of parodies, satires, graffiti, caricatures, and cartoons—however irreverent—that booby-traps professional pomposity and reveals the frolicsome, funny dimension of librarianship?

—a compendium of historical, evaluative, and bibliographic writings on the Underground Press, "counter-culture," and "liberation" publishing, plus a cross-section of views on what the library attitude should be toward such materials and some objective data on how libraries have actually responded to them thus far in terms of selection, display, publicity, access, and censorial encounters?

6. *Watchdogging*. If any group has the competence and wherewithal to first identify and then exercise pressure to correct malpractice or delinquencies in tax-supported, federally operated libraries, it's ALA. The same holds for state and municipal associations with respect to state, county, and city institutions.

Prison libraries are notoriously un-

derstocked and poorly staffed. Moreover, prison officials often deliberately and arbitrarily restrict the reading opportunities of inmates according to their own, private beliefs or whims about "what's good for the cons." At minimum, ALA could sponsor a survey of prison library facilities and practices (which should include interviews with convicts, penologists, and warders), prepare basic guidelines, and—where necessary—intercede with authorities to improve conditions.

USIS. Library and general periodicals have abundantly disclosed that the globe-spanning U.S. Information Service library system practices a "mainstream," Babbitt-like censorship which largely excludes material by radicals, pacifists, black militants, avant-garde literati, counter-culturists, and even extreme rightists. The agency, for example, will apparently not even consider buying a book issued by International Publishers in New York, whose list includes major works by W. E. B. DuBois, John Reed, Herbert Aptheker, Clarence Major, Phillip S. Foner, and "Big Bill" Haywood. In all likelihood, a similar ban obtains for the Pathfinder Press, formerly Merit Publishers, whose catalog features a half dozen titles by and about Malcolm X, a collection of Eu-

gene Debs' speeches, the stenographic record of the IWW's founding convention, and a pamphlet on Chicano studies—all important pieces of Americana. The "image" these collections project to overseas readers is a distortion. It is not the everyday America we know, at once hopeful and floundering, imaginative and mediocre, violent and gentle, hate-ridden and loving. The thoroughly sanitized, plastic-packaged "America" marketed by USIS libraries insults us and affronts literate people abroad, many of whom surely recognize the put-on and can hardly think well of a nation that by perpetrating such deceit plainly thinks so little of *them*. Our national reputation would indisputably suffer less from candor than from bullshit. A possible ALA role might be to initially investigate USIS selection policy, not merely examining official statements and other documentary evidence, but also conducting first-hand checks at random facilities, and then—if the data so indicate—simultaneously make these findings public and demand change, perhaps with an explicit threat of sanctions.

Military libraries have long ignored the Library Bill of Rights' injunction to represent all possible political and other viewpoints. It is doubtful that any presently receive and openly display GI anti-war papers, scores of which have blossomed in the States, Europe, and Asia, although their relevance to servicemen is perfectly obvious. And one Special Services librarian in Europe not so long ago encountered truly incredible static when he attempted to add the "Wolfenden Report," several outspoken volumes on the Afro-American experience, and some modern literary classics—by Henry Miller, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Jean Genet, and others—to a local collection. Of these works it was said either that "We have enough of that sort of thing already" or "No one will read them," both contentions being equally absurd. The system had, in fact, bought Sartre's treatise on Genet, but balked at stocking anything by the celebrated playwright-novelist. Additionally, the operative myth regarding homosexuals in uniform is that there are none. Later, when that same librarian protested against the official distribution and endorsement of palpably right-wing material produced by the Freedoms Foundation, he was advised by superiors that he might be happier working someplace else.

Moreover, the implicitly sanctioned role of military librarians—almost exclusively women—has been as much that of high-caste sex-ornament and morality-maid as book-jockey and mind-vibrator. And, at least a few years ago, off-duty social liaisons with enlisted men were definitely taboo, a sure-fire way to dis-ingratiate oneself with



The above poster was developed by librarians of the 8th Army Command in Korea

the higher ups. If military libraries remain oblivious to many soldiers', sailors', and airmen's authentic interests and needs (even when these conflict with brass-pronounced orthodoxy) and continue to thrust degrading, sexist roles upon our sisters who staff them, the situation merits attention by the whole profession. A first step might be for present and former military librarians to openly document the matter from their own experience. The *Wilson Library Bulletin*, for example, could profitably devote a full issue to the topic, possibly including contributions from GI library users, as well. Were such a symposium to demolish the above allegations: Beautiful! If not, the necessity would persist to "shape up."

Finally, given an honest commitment

to "social responsibility," to tackling, library-wise, the manifold problems of poverty, imperialism, discrimination, and public waste, ALA cannot in the future hold its meetings in plush hotels and racist atmospheres, nor charge impecunious colleagues and even ordinary (but concerned) folk what may be a prohibitive fee to simply watch the Association at work.

UNLIMITED PUSHBUTTONS
AND PARAPHERNALIA TO
THE TECHNO-BUREAUCRATS!

DYNAMIC, RESPONSIVE,
SANELY-EQUIPPED LIBRAR-
IES TO THE PEOPLE!

Under which banner do we proceed?