

The International Responsibilities Task Force of the ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table

## **Cuba: Sovereignty, Development and Intellectual Freedom**

Sunday, June 17 4:30-6:30 p.m.

Westin St. Francis

Elizabethan D

San Francisco CA

### **FEATURED SPEAKERS:**

Marta Terry, President of ASCUBI (the Cuban National Library Association) and Past-Director of the Jose Marti National Library of Cuba

Rhonda Neugebauer, Latin American Studies bibliographer, University of California, Riverside

Larry Oberg, University Librarian, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University

Ann Spananese, Head of Adult & Young Adult Services, Englewood (NJ) Public Library

### **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:**

Libraries are a valued, vibrant sector in Cuba's struggle for development and independence. Under the US embargo they have fought to overcome formidable obstacles to their mission to bring literacy, culture and information to the broadest community. We will address the interplay of the embargo, the realities of Cuban librarians, and the issues of intellectual freedom.

### **DOCUMENTS:**

August 1994

April 2000

January 2001

February 2001

April 2001

IFLA Cuba Statement

"Oberg Report"

Spananese Testimony to International Relations Committee

*American Libraries* article

*American Libraries* "Conference Call"

*NOTE: The International Federation of Library Associations held its 1994 Annual Conference in Havana, Cuba. Fifty-two U.S. and Puerto Rican librarians signed a resolution calling on the U.S. government to normalize relations with Cuba. This was an important public position taken by librarians. In recent years broad-based efforts within various sectors of U.S. society have gained momentum to end the blockade.*

## **IFLA CUBA STATEMENT**

### **Statement of Librarians from the United States and Puerto Rico on U.S. - Cuba Relations**

We librarians from the United States and Puerto Rico have just completed our productive participation in the 60th conference of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in Havana, Cuba. We were hosted by hundreds of dedicated Cuban librarians from all types of libraries throughout the island. As a group, we feel compelled to give our colleagues and government representatives our observations. We urge a reevaluation of U.S. policy towards Cuba, leading towards normalization of relations.

We have seen first-hand the determination of our Cuban colleagues to advance their library services despite the hardships, shortages, and material limitations they are now experiencing. We have witnessed their determination to safeguard basic gains in education, including library services, in the context of developing aspects of a market economy. We have been deeply impressed by their commitment to common professional objectives and deeply moved by their generosity in hosting librarians from all over the world despite their problems.

It is clear that many of these problems could be alleviated by the end of the U.S. economic blockade against Cuba and the normalization of relations between our two countries. Diplomatic and economic ties between the U.S. and other nations (such as China and Vietnam) with which the U.S. has ideological differences, have been achieved. Why not do the same with Cuba? Normalization would allow the flow of food and medicine into Cuba through trade, reduce the hunger of Cuban people, and stem the tide of those Cubans who are trying to escape these economic hardships by taking to the sea in rafts.

But Cuba will not be the only beneficiary from such a course. U.S. businesses and the American people will benefit from trade, and the prestige of the U.S. in world affairs will be enhanced by its ability to abandon an outdated policy which is universally opposed in the international community.

We have been privileged among U.S. citizens to have the opportunity to visit, research and study library service in Cuba and to confer with colleagues from every continent gathered here. And although we have done this within the guidelines of the U.S. Treasury Department, we have been deeply embarrassed by the senseless restrictions placed on travel here for U.S. citizens. We librarians struggle daily for intellectual freedom and the right to know. These are fundamental principles of our profession and our democratic system. The continuation of a policy which limits the right of U.S. citizens to travel is unworthy of a great nation and contradicts our country's ideals of personal and intellectual freedom and human rights.

In conclusion, we urge our government to seek negotiations with the government of Cuba aimed at normalizing relations, ending the blockade, and reinstituting unfettered travel and exchanges between the people of our two countries.

from: Progressive Librarian #9, Spring 1995

*NOTE: Efforts to normalize relations between the U.S. and Cuba have met with a backlash. Within the library world an organization called "Friends of Cuban Libraries" has worked to discredit librarians seeking an end to the blockade. The memo below, referred to as the "Oberg Report," was written in response to charges leveled against Rhonda Neugebauer for her planned trip to Cuba. The charges were deemed baseless. The report also represents the first firsthand account of a visit to the so-called independent libraries in Cuba.*

To: Charles Harmon, chair, and members of the ALA Committee on Professional Ethics.  
From: Larry R. Oberg, University Librarian, Willamette University, Salem, Oregon  
Re: Robert Kent and Friends of Cuban Libraries.

Dear Charles and Committee members:

On Monday, 3 April 2000, I returned from a two-week research trip to Cuba. The trip was organized and conducted by Rhonda Neugebauer of Wichita State and included some fourteen other librarians from around the country. During our stay, we visited many libraries and spoke with countless librarians and support staff. Our stay included visits to the Biblioteca Nacional "Jose Marti;" the Biblioteca Provincial "Ruben Martinez Villena" in Havana; the Biblioteca Publica "Elvira Cape" in Santiago de Cuba; the Biblioteca Central "Ruben Martinez Villena" of the University of Havana; and public libraries in Matanzas, Cardinas and Varadero. We also visited the Instituto de Historia de Cuba; The Archivo General de la Isla de Cuba; the Escuela Nacional de Tecnicos de Bibliotecas in Havana; several elementary and secondary school libraries; and the Latin America literary incubator and publishing house, Casa de las Americas.

In Santiago de Cuba, a few of our group also visited two of what Mr. Robert Kent of the Friends of Cuban Libraries calls "independent" libraries. We spoke at length with the people who are responsible for these "libraries." Please allow me to summarize a few of the conclusions I have reached about Cuban libraries in general and about the "independent" libraries that Mr. Kent has championed in innumerable postings on innumerable library listservs. Please understand that these are my personal conclusions and are not intended to represent the perceptions of other members of the group.

## 1. CUBAN LIBRARIES

- The materials budgets of Cuban libraries are dramatically underfunded. But, libraries are not alone in this regard. The financial crisis that this island nation has undergone since the collapse of the Soviet bloc (something the Cubans refer to as the "special period") has had a severe impact on book publishing, industry, construction and many other areas of the economy, including of course, living standards.

- The Cuban librarians that I met were, with a few exceptions, highly professional, talented and capable. They are committed to professional excellence and are clearly abreast of current trends in North American and European librarianship.

- The Jose Marti National Library and the major provincial and city libraries are busily preparing for automation. The National Library's systems staff has developed a plan for a national union catalog and network that only awaits funding for implementation. (A nationwide science and research network is also being created by the National Institute of Science and Technology (Havana), which we also visited.)

- Most of the libraries that we visited have clear collection development policies and standards. The national library collects materials on all topics and does not limit its collections to materials that support the ideology of the Cuban government. They actively solicit, for example, copies of materials published by dissident Cuban authors who reside abroad. At the same time, they do not necessarily add all of the vehemently anti-Fidel materials published by dissident Cubans who reside in Miami, just as North American libraries do not actively seek out and buy all of the anti-gay and lesbian tracts published in Colorado Springs and other centers of right-wing Christian publishing.

- Cuban librarians take their outreach obligations seriously and have invested heavily in bookmobiles and branch libraries in isolated rural locations. They are particularly committed to making libraries services available to rural Cuban children.

- School libraries are ubiquitous in Cuba. Almost all elementary and secondary schools have libraries and librarians. (We might compare this to the situation in the United States.) We spoke at length with a group of second graders in a Matanzas elementary school who asked bright and intelligent questions of us. They were reading Jose Marti's *The Red Slippers*.

## THE "INDEPENDENT" CUBAN LIBRARIES

Some of our group visited two "independent" libraries. Both of these were listed, with addresses, in one of Robert Kent's numerous postings on library listservs. The following bulleted items represent my personal understanding of what we found:

- The first "independent" library we visited was in Santiago de Cuba. It was located in private home and consisted of two bookcases filled with books, one in the living room, another in a back bedroom. I would estimate that this collection might have included 200 volumes. The woman who tended the collection spoke freely and openly with us about herself and her "library." She insisted that the main objective of the library was to make materials available to children, but could produce no children's books. Many of the books in the "collection" were published in Cuba, although perhaps the bulk were published in the United States, Mexico, Spain and other countries. She showed us a copy of a single issue of the Cuban periodical Educacion as an example of how she wishes to make books available to students. She told us that she was considering removing the back cover of the issue, however, because it includes a quote from Fidel Castro. She told us that most of her relatives live in Miami and that she regularly records and broadcasts statements on Radio Marti and Radio Mambi, both of which beam anti-Cuban government programming to Cuba from the United States.

- The second "independent" library that we visited was also in Santiago de Cuba. This "library" had no books or materials at all. The family that lived in the apartment said that they had distributed all of the materials they had had to sympathetic individuals in preparation for leaving for Miami. They recently received exit visas from the U. S. government and expect to depart Cuba in May. They explained that they had never collected books per se, but rather had relied upon deliveries of pamphlets, reprints of articles and other materials that came directly from the U. S. Interest Section in Havana. These materials, they noted, were hand-delivered by Americans who came to their home in automobiles. They considered that these materials were better than books because they not only supported their political beliefs and also could be used to enlighten others about North American democracy. They agreed that these materials were useful in their efforts to bring others to their anti-government position and to recruit others to the anti-Castro movement.

## MY CONCLUSIONS:

- Marta Terry, the president of the Cuban Library Association, and other Cuban librarians pointed out to us that they have tried many times to contact and work with these "librarians." The independent "librarians" with whom we spoke, however, have never approached the established libraries because they vaguely feel that they would be rebuffed.

- Mr. Kent continually insists that the "independent librarians" of Cuba are our peers and colleagues. In neither of the two cases that I cite above do the principals have degrees or training in librarianship, nor do they even appear to be what we might call "book-oriented" people. They are not librarians by any definition that we would understand.

- Neither of the two "independent" libraries that I visited are marked or signed in any way as libraries. One had no collection whatsoever and the other had a modest collection of materials of a size that one might expect to find in any Cuban home. The one collection that I saw was not cataloged or even organized by subject. There was no circulation apparatus and this collection had no materials to support its stated collecting goal, children's literature.

- The independent "librarians" that I met are all self-professed political dissidents, and appear dedicated to the overthrow of the Cuban government. (They spoke with us openly and apparently without fear of reprisal about their anti-government activities.) They are closely allied with the U. S. government, the U. S. Interest Section in Cuba and with Cuban dissidents in Miami and Mexico. Several had been arrested by the Cuban authorities, but they emphasized that these arrests had nothing to do with their "independent" library activities. The arrests, in all cases, were for subversive and clandestine activities carried out to undermine the Cuban government. It is my distinct impression that these libraries are, on the one hand, a public face and a recruiting tool for a dissident movement within Cuba and, on the other, a means of "jumping the queue" to get an immigration visa to the United States.

MR. ROBERT KENT

Upon my return I found that I had received a copy of a letter, dated 15 March, from Mr. Robert Kent addressed to you and the members of the ALA Committee on Professional Ethics. In his letter, Mr. Kent presents censorship of Cuban library collections and suppression of the "independent" libraries as an established fact. With this firmly established, he anticipates duplicity on the part of Ms. Neugebauer and, by extension, those who accompanied her. He cites the stated objective of the group, "to hold discussions between U. S. and Cuban librarians on key aspects of librarianship such as philosophy, values, ethics and professional practices," as evidence that she "apparently has no intention of supporting intellectual freedom during the library program she will be conducting in Cuba." He concludes by suggesting that her activities in this area "may be subject to an inquiry by the ALA Committee on Professional Ethics."

I accompanied Ms. Neugebauer on all of the visits that the group made in Cuba and I wish to make the following comments:

- In all encounters with Cuban librarians, and indeed with Cuban citizens, Ms. Neugebauer and the other members of the group conducted themselves at the highest professional level; a level that does honor to our profession and the American Library Association.

- In all of our meetings with Cuban librarians, Ms. Neugebauer and other members of the group asked penetrating questions about government interference in collection development, the independence of Cuban librarians, and other questions that probed their philosophy, values, ethics and professional practices.

- I know that Ms. Neugebauer and the other members of our research group are deeply committed to intellectual freedom and oppose censorship in all its forms.

It is, therefore, deeply disturbing to me to be accused, in advance of the fact, of dissimulation and dereliction of professional standards. For myself, I believe that many of you know that my name, my publications, and my professional activities have always strongly supported intellectual freedom and the autonomy of librarians in the development of their collections. My record in this area will withstand the deepest scrutiny.

It seems to me that Mr. Kent's charges against Ms. Neugebauer should be dismissed forthwith. His activities and his charges against Cuban librarians are unproven and, certainly, conflict with what I found in long and probing conversations with these very librarians. Mr. Kent's rhetoric is inflamed and his charges reflect more accurately his politics than they do the practice of Cuban librarians.

Finally, I want to state that I know Ms. Neugebauer to be a honorable and principled librarian, someone who is committed not only to high professional standards but is also dedicated to the truth wherever it may lead. Mr. Kent's charges are outrageous and unfounded and I request that you and the members of the committee dismiss them out-of-hand.

*NOTE: The memo below provides background on the "Friends of Cuban Libraries" and addresses several questions regarding libraries and the state of intellectual freedom in Cuba.*

January 8, 2001

To: Pat Wand, Chairperson, ALA IRC Latin American & Caribbean Subcommittee  
From: Ann C. Sparanese, SRRT Action Councilor  
Subject: Hearing on Charges by "Friends of Cuban Libraries"

Thank you for inviting me to speak before your Subcommittee. These notes have been prepared for your consideration.

I am the head of Adult & Young Adult Services at the Englewood Public Library in New Jersey. I have been an active member of ALA for ten years. As well as serving on SRRT Action Council and its International Responsibilities Task Force, I have been a member of YALSA's Best Books for Young Adults Committee, the AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups, and I am the current Chairperson of RUSA's John Sessions Memorial Award Committee. I also have a long history of interest in, and travel to, Cuba. I attended the 1994 IFLA Conference in Havana and my most recent visit was this past November, when I visited Cuban libraries and met with Havana members of ASCUBI, the Cuban Library Association. I have followed with interest, and argued against, the allegations of Mr. Kent since he began his campaign in 1999. The Social Responsibilities Round Table passed the attached resolution regarding the FCL at midwinter conference one year ago.

Mr. Kent would like to present his proposal as a no-brainer, a simple question, a single pure concept: intellectual freedom. But it is not. This paper is respectfully submitted with the hope that the subcommittee may approach Mr. Kent's requests with a fuller appreciation of history, the facts and the issues.

#### 1. Who Are the "Friends of Cuban Libraries?"

This is how Robert Kent and Jorge Sanguinety described themselves at the outset of their campaign for Cuban "independent libraries."<sup>1</sup>

Before going to the debate, however, the Friends of Cuban Libraries would like to answer some inquiries from the public regarding the goals and origin of our organization. The Friends of Cuban Libraries, founded on June 1, 1999, is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization which supports Cuba's independent libraries. We oppose censorship and all other violations of intellectual freedom, as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, regardless of the ideology or leadership of whatever Cuban government is in office. The founders of the organization are Jorge Sanguinety and Robert Kent. Jorge Sanguinety resides in Miami. He was the head of Cuba's Department of National Investment Planning before he left the country in 1967. He was later associated with the Brookings Institution and the UN Development Programme. He is the founder and president of Devtech, Inc. He is also a newspaper columnist and a commentator on Radio Marti. Robert Kent is a librarian who lives in New York City. He has visited Cuba many times and has Cuban friends whose viewpoints cover the political spectrum. During his visits to Cuba Robert Kent has assisted Cuban, American, and internationally-based human rights organizations with deliveries of medicines, small sums of money, and other forms of humanitarian aid. On four occasions he has taken books and pamphlets to Cuba for Freedom House and the Center for a Free Cuba, human rights organizations which have received publication grants from the U.S. Agency for International Development; on three occasions his travel expenses were paid wholly or in part by Freedom House or the Center for a Free Cuba. On his last trip to Cuba in February, 1999, Robert Kent was arrested and deported from the country.

Many references to Mr. Sanguinety appear on the WWW. He speaks widely on the subject of returning free market enterprise to Cuba. As a commentator on Radio Marti, Mr. Sanguinety is or was an employee of the United States government. Cubans on the island have always listened to Miami radio and even some TV stations. But Radio Marti is a propaganda station directly controlled by the most right-wing elements of the Cuban-American exile community, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF). It is not a neutral voice or a bastion of "free expression." It has never aired the voices of liberal elements of the Cuban-American community who favor the normalization of relations with Cuba. Mr. Sanguinety is simply a professional propagandist.

In October 1995, President Clinton presented a \$500,000 government grant to Freedom House for publishing and distributing

pamphlets and books in Cuba.<sup>2</sup> The funds were also devoted to paying for individuals to travel to Cuba as tourists in order to make contact with dissident groups, organize them and fund them.<sup>3</sup> Robert Kent is evidently one of these couriers -another propagandist on an illegal, paid-for mission on behalf of Freedom House. He is not the only American to be sent on such a mission<sup>4</sup> and be deported. Kent evidently believes that by acknowledging his sponsor, this somehow legitimizes his activities. But it only demonstrates the nature of his campaign as part and parcel of stated US foreign policy intended to destabilize Cuba.

## 2. What Are the "Independent Libraries"?

The "independent libraries" are private book collections in peoples' homes. Mr. Kent and the right-wing Cuban-American propaganda outlets, call them "independent libraries" and even "public libraries." These "independent libraries" are one of a number of "projects" initiated and supported by a virtual entity calling itself "Cubanet"(www.cubanet.org) and an expatriate anti-Castro political entity calling itself the Directorio Revolucionario Democrático Cubano. The Cubanet website describes what the "independent libraries" are, how they got started and who funds and solicits for them. The index page says that the organization exists to "assist [Cuba's] independent sector develop [sic] a civil society..." This is the wording used in both the Torricelli and the Helms Burton Acts, both of which require that the US government finance efforts to subvert the Cuban society in the name of strengthening "civil society." You will see on the "Who We Are" page that Cubanet, located in Hialeah, Florida, is financially supported by the National Endowment for Democracy, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and "private" "anonymous" donors. The "exterior" representative of the "independent libraries" is the Directorio Revolucionario Democrático Cubano, also located in Hialeah.<sup>5</sup>

## 3. Who are the Independent Librarians?

You will read on the pages of Cubanet about the individual "libraries" and their personnel. Not one of the people listed is actually a librarian. Not one has ever been a librarian. Most, however, are leaders or officers of various dissident political parties, such as the Partido Cubano de Renovación Ortodoxa and the Partido Solidaridad Democrática. This is documented on Cubanet, although Mr. Kent never mentions these party affiliations in his FCL press releases. We know absolutely nothing about the principles, programs or activities of these parties, or why they have been allegedly targeted. We don't know whether their activities are lawful or unlawful under Cuban law. Kent maintains that their activities are solely related to their books - but in reality we have no idea whether this is true and in fact, one of these "librarians" told one of our ALA colleagues that this was not true! By using the terms "beleaguered," "librarians" and the buzzwords "freedom of expression" and "colleagues" Mr. Kent hopes to get the a priori support of librarians who might not look beneath this veneer. After all, isn't this the reason that the subcommittee will be considering their case in the first place? But I wonder if ALA is willing to establish the precedent that all politicians with private book collections who decide to call themselves "librarians," are therefore our "colleagues"?

## 4. Who funds Cubanet, the Directorio, and the "independent libraries" - and why is this important?

A recent book entitled *Psy War Against Cuba* by Jon Elliston (Ocean Press, 1999), reveals, using declassified US government documents, the history of a small piece of the 40-year-old propaganda war waged by our country against the government of Cuba. The US has spent hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars over these years to subvert and overthrow the current Cuban government - US activities have included complete economic embargo, assassinations and assassination attempts, sabotage, bombings, invasions, and "psyops." When even the fall of the Soviet Union and the devastation of the Cuban economy in the early 1990's did not produce the desired effect, the US embarked on additional, subtler, campaigns to overthrow the Cuban government from within. One element of this approach is the funneling of monetary support to dissident groups wherever they can be found, or created. This includes bringing cash into the country through couriers such as Mr. Kent, and increasing support to expatriate groups operating inside the US, such as the Directorio, Cubanet and especially, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF).

The website Afrocubaweb (www.afrocubaweb.org) has gathered information from the Miami Herald and other sources to document the recipients of this US funding. USAID, a US government Agency, supported the Directorio Revolucionario Democrático Cubano to the amount of \$554,835 during 1999. This is the group that supports the "independent librarians" in Cuba and is listed as their "foreign representative." The money that they send to Cuba, as well as the "small amounts" of cash that Mr. Kent carried illegally to Cuba violates Cuban law, which does not allow foreign funding of their political process. Neither does the United States allow foreign funding of its own political process - the furor around alleged Chinese "contributions" to the Democratic Party is a case in point. The "independent libraries" may be independent of their own government, but they are not independent of the US government.

The US government is not the only anti-Castro entity that has adjusted its policy to changing times-- the most right-wing forces in the Cuban expatriate community have also stepped up their support of dissident elements inside Cuba over the last few years. The Miami Herald reported in September 2000 that "the leading institution of this city's exile community plans to quadruple the amount of money it sends to dissident leaders on the island..." This leading institution is the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), and the article reports that part of the group's \$10,000,000 budget will begin "flowing to the island through sympathetic dissidents by the end of the year." More specifically, CANF will, among other declared activities, "increase funds to buy books for its [Cuba's] independent libraries."<sup>6</sup>

5. What is CANF? What is its record on free expression, intellectual freedom, and democratic rights here in the USA?

The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) was founded by Jorge Mas Canosa, a veteran of the Bay of Pigs invasion and CIA operative, at the behest of the Reagan administration in 1982. It has become the most wealthy and powerful voice of the right-wing Cuban community in South Florida and has wielded extraordinary political power for the last twenty years. It has been connected to violence and terrorism both in Cuba and in Miami. Its newest tactic, as described above, is to "support" dissidents in Cuba, including buying books for "independent" libraries, presumably to support "freedom of expression" in Cuba.

Mr. Kent and Mr. Sanguinetti claim to be proponents of human rights and frequently refer to the "landmark" IFLA "report." But they seem to have no problem with their libraries' CANF connection, even though CANF was the subject of a truly "landmark" report issued by Americas Watch, a division of Human Rights Watch, in 1992. The Americas Watch report on CANF is the first that organization ever issued against a human rights violator in a city of the United States. It states that "a 'repressive climate for freedom of expression' had been created by anti-Castro Cuban-American leaders in which violence and intimidation had been used to quiet exiles who favor a softening of policies toward Cuba."<sup>7</sup> The executive director of Americas Watch at that time, said "We do not know of any other community in the United States with this level of intimidation and lack of freedom to dissent."<sup>8</sup> The report documents "how Miami Cubans who are opposed to the Cuban government harass political opponents with bombings, vandalism, beatings and death threats."<sup>9</sup> A campaign spearheaded by CANF against the Miami Herald in the early nineties resulted in bombings of Herald newspaper boxes and death threats to staff. <sup>10</sup> Pressure from CANF closed the Cuban Museum of Arts and Culture because it showed work by artists who had not "broken" with Cuba.<sup>11</sup> Anyone who followed the Elian Gonzalez case this past year noted that tolerance for dissenting views by Cuban Americans was completely lacking in Florida and a hostile atmosphere was maintained by CANF during the duration of the affair. Can you imagine what the life expectancy of a pro-Castro "independent library" in the middle of Little Havana would be, given this history?

CANF does not respect freedom of expression or democratic rights in the USA, yet it is a direct financial supporter of Mr. Kent's independent libraries. Neither Mr. Kent nor Mr. Sanguinetti have disowned this support - in fact they haven't even mentioned it! They have not chosen to examine or criticize the lack of free expression among the very people that give them succor and publicity here at home, yet they claim to be its great champions in Cuba!

6. What about free expression and democratic rights in Cuba?

There is no doubt that political dissidence has its consequences in Cuba. Those who want to overthrow the current socialist government are considered political problems. Because of the declared and well-funded US policy of seeking to destabilize Cuba by creating and/or instigating social unrest, the Cuban people consider these people to be agents of US policy and enemies of the nation. This view is shared by the former head of the US Interests Section in Cuba, former Ambassador Wayne Smith who says: "Since 1985, we have stated publicly that we will encourage and openly finance dissident and human rights groups in Cuba; this too is in our interest. The United States isn't financing all those groups - only the ones that are best known internationally. Those dissidents and human rights groups in Cuba - that are nothing but a few people - are only important to the extent that they serve us in a single cause: that of destabilizing Fidel Castro's regime."<sup>12</sup>

This is the reality of a small country that has been in a virtual state of siege by the most powerful country in the world for more than 40 years. The US has engaged in invasion, sabotage, assassination attempts against its leader and even the maintenance of a military base against the will of the Cuban people, as well as well-documented psyop and propaganda campaigns. With the economic blockade, the US has sought to bring the Cuban people to their knees by depriving them of sources of foodstuffs and denying medicine to their children.<sup>13</sup> Ambassador Smith: "Through these two policies, economic pressure and human rights -



we want to force the overthrow of Fidel Castro and then install a transitional government that we like - to reinstate the people we want and thus, control Cuba again."14

It is a fact of life that democratic rights suffer in any nation under siege or engaged in war. A view of our own history will illuminate this point: simply look at the what happened to the American people's freedom of expression, constitutional rights and human rights during the Civil War, WWI, WWII, the Cold War McCarthy period and even during our most recent wars. Can we realistically expect and demand that Cuba be the model of democratic rights in the face of the unrelenting US economic and political aggression?

Cuba does not have a perfect human rights record. But are we simply to condemn Cuba for this situation? Don't we, as US citizens, whose tax dollar has been used for so many years to create this situation, have a special responsibility to look at the full picture? Shouldn't our first concern be to change the policy that has directly contributed to the limitation of democratic rights in Cuba? Even the UN special rapporteur for human rights, while critical of Cuba, credited the US policy for making the situation worse than it might otherwise be.15

Mssrs. Kent and Sanguinetty are asking this committee and the ALA for a sweeping condemnation of Cuba on the basis of human rights. But are not food, education, medical care, income, freedom from violence, and literacy "human rights"? The Cuban people enjoy free medical care - despite the US denial of Cuba's right to purchase basic medical products - and have one of the highest per capita rate of doctors in the world. All Cuban children attend school and enjoy free education through university. The Cuban people are an extraordinarily literate people with many more libraries and books than people in most of the undeveloped world, despite Mr. Kent's attempts to ridicule their library collections with absurd claims that have been refuted by Cuban librarians. Cuban workers have the right to an income even if they have been laid off from work; they have a society free from violence and no Cuban child has ever been killed by a gun in his/her school. Racism, as we know it in the US, is not present there and vestiges of racism are actively combated at all levels of society. If these are taken as measures of human rights, Cuba comes out looking very good indeed. This is not to say that intellectual freedom and complete freedom of expression are not important. But Cuba's exceptional success in fulfilling these basic human needs explains why the majority of the Cuban people are not anxious to trade their current situation for the "free market", "wealthy exiles get their property back" plans of Kent/Sanguinetty's sponsors in Miami and the US government.

Before the ALA passes judgment on Cuba, even in the area of free expression, we need to look at the whole picture and we need to have some first-hand experience. We cannot simply act on what one ill-informed librarian and a professional expatriate propagandist -- both with US government backing -- tell us.

#### 7. How does US policy towards Cuba affect free expression and intellectual freedom for US citizens?

For close to forty years, in various permutations, the US has maintained a travel ban, which specifically denies the right of US citizens to visit Cuba outside a small set of "legal" and "licensed" exceptions. This means that if any US citizen (any US librarian, for instance) wants to travel to Cuba, simply to see for her/himself what is going on there (not for any specifically academic or professional purpose), this is against US law and punishable by fines and/or imprisonment. If members of this subcommittee want to visit Cuban libraries, simply to chat with your counterparts and even seek out the "independent librarians" - it is not the Cuban government that is preventing you, it is the US government! This is clearly an issue of intellectual freedom16 - but not to Mssrs. Kent and Sanguinetty. They are purists. They are only concerned about freedom of expression and intellectual freedom in Cuba - not in the US- and only for Cubans in Cuba, not in Miami! This is utter hypocrisy. Because of this forty-year war against Cuba by the United States, it is not just Cuban citizens who have seen their democratic rights limited, it is US citizens as well. To deliberately ignore this reality reveals the claims and motives of Mr. Kent and Mr. Sanguinetty as deeply suspect.

#### 8. What About the IFLA Report?

Why has the FCL been able to go forward with their accusations? The answer is a report by the recently formed IFLA -FAIFE (Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression) Committee. The sole basis for this action - the first such action taken by committee - was the Friends of Cuban Libraries allegations, and several phone conversations with the alleged librarians involved. No member of FAIFE ever visited these "libraries" or attempted to. No "investigation" whatsoever was undertaken beyond these phone contacts. Parts of the report were taken verbatim from the papers of Mr. Kent and Mr. Sanguinetty. Even the FAIFE report acknowledges the role of financing by "foreign interests," but it does not seem to find this point very important. It does not address the issue of who these "librarians" really are, but accepts FCL's allegations that they are

librarians. The IFLA investigation meets no standards. Nevertheless, it has bestowed on Mr. Kent's cause a certain legitimacy and has allowed Kent to go to the Canadian Library Association, and other groups, which also reacted to the IFLA report and did no independent investigation. In an especially crass but clever move, Kent even managed to get a recently imprisoned Chinese American librarian to make statements about a situation about which he has no knowledge.

Perhaps IFLA can be forgiven for not understanding the nature of US hostility toward Cuba, and the lengths to which the US and the right-wing Cuban expatriate elements will go to further their aims of overthrowing the Cuban government. But the American Library Association will have no such excuse. Our own members and colleagues have visited Cuban libraries and the "independents" (without prior notification) and have testified as to their inauthenticity. They must be listened to. This is already more than IFLA cared to do. The IFLA report, and all that followed because of it, cannot be allowed to grant any further imprimatur to the Kent/Sanguinetti campaign.

#### 9. What about our real colleagues - the librarians of Cuba?

The charges that have been spread by Kent and his FCL have deeply offended our real colleagues, the librarians of Cuba, and our sister library association, ASCUBI. Our real colleagues are beleaguered by shortages of things as simple as paper, professional literature, computers and printers - and much of this has to do with their inability, because of the US blockade, to purchase any items from US companies (or foreign companies doing business with the US). Computers cannot be brought to Cuba from the US legally, even as a donation by licensed travelers. True "friends of Cuban libraries" would be concerned about these matters.

It is time that we begin to know our real counterparts/colleagues in Cuba. It is time that we begin to have the kinds of conversations and exchanges on all subjects -- including intellectual freedom and censorship. It is US policy, not Cuban policy, which prevents us from doing so. As the representative of US librarians, the ALA has an obligation first to address our own country's limitation of freedom of expression and the freedom to travel, then to criticize others. The American Library Association cannot allow itself to be the willing instrument of a US government/CANF-sponsored disinformation campaign.

If the ALA takes any action at all on Cuba, it should be to call for an end to the embargo and the hostile US policy towards Cuba which harms the democratic rights, including freedom of expression, of both the Cuban and US people. ALA should begin in the spirit of the resolution passed by the US librarians who attended the IFLA conference in Havana in August 1994 (see attached).

1 See [http://internet.ggu.edu/university\\_library/if/cuba.html](http://internet.ggu.edu/university_library/if/cuba.html). Most of the activities carried out by the FCL take place on the listserves, of which this site has an "anthology."

2 Franklin, Jane. *Cuba and The United States: A Chronological History*. Melbourne, Ocean Press, 1997. p375.

3 Calvo, Hernando and Katlijn Declercq. *The Cuban Exile Movement: Dissidents or Mercenaries?* New York, Ocean Press, 2000. p.130.

4 Ibid.

5 Another of its stated purposes is "informs the world about Cuba's reality", but their news pages simply report only anti-government events or incidents.

6 "In Miami, Cuban Exile Group Shifts Focus" by Scott Wilson. *The Washington Post Foreign Service*. Thursday, September 14, 2000; Page A03. As quoted at <http://afrocubaweb.org/dissidents.htm>.

7 "Miami Leaders are Condemned by Rights Unit" by Larry Rohter. *New York Times*, August 19, 1992 Section A, Page 8, retrieved from Lexis-Nexis.

8 Ibid.

9 Franklin, p.300.

10 Op.cit.

11 Franklin, p 241, 242, 252,277.

12 Calvo & Declercq, pp 156, (interview with Ambassador Smith.)

13 "Denial of Food and Medicine: The Impact of the U.S. Embargo on Health and Nutrition in Cuba," A Report from the American Association for World Health, March 1997.

14 Calvo & Declercq, p160.

15 Franklin, p 330.

16 In "The Right to Travel: The Effect of Travel Restrictions on Scientific Collaboration Between American and Cuban Scientists," the American Association for the Advancement of Science is every bit as critical of the United States in limiting travel as it is of Cuba! The report notes that the US government does not recognize the right to travel as an internationally recognized fundamental right. <http://shr.aas.org/rtt/report/one.htm>.

# Cuba's National Library

THE REVOLUTION MEETS THE MILLENNIUM

**T**he Cuban climate is the enemy of paper," said National Library Director Eliades Acosta in December 2000, at the close of a 10-year project to install air conditioning and humidity controls throughout the stacks containing three million volumes on Cuban history, art, and culture. Unfortunately for researchers, most of the reading rooms are climate-controlled only by fans and open windows that offer free access to the occasional bird.

Meanwhile, the library's conservation and restoration laboratory is microfilming, digitizing, repairing, and rebinding books as quickly as it can with insufficient resources, which means only about 200 per month.

The air-conditioning project culminated just in time to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the library—officially called the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí—founded in 1901 by military order during the United States occupation after the Spanish-American War. Funded by the Ministry of Culture, the library is charged with compiling a Cuban national bibliography and serves as the information hub for the island's 13 provincial libraries and 388 public libraries.

Ten years ago, *American Libraries* Contributing Editor Ron Chepesiuk offered an overview of Cuban libraries (Nov. 1990, p. 994–997). At that time, the Soviet support system was collapsing, Cuba's economy was contracting by an estimated 35%, and materials and services were becoming much scarcer.

A turnaround began in 1993 when U.S. dollars were legalized as an official currency and other economic reforms were introduced. But

ask any librarian or any other Cuban you meet: Nearly everything is still hard to come by, from books and computer parts to food, soap, and medicine.

"Two years ago [1998], we had nothing," Head of Automation Judith Reyes said. "Now we have a national network that supplies all the provincial libraries with e-mail and Internet service." Some public libraries are still on the waiting list, she explained. "Everything is step by step here."

## Computer technology

Just as Cuba's ingenious mechanics keep their '53 Buicks and '57 Chevys running against all odds, Reyes and her staff fine-tune whatever computer equipment they can scrounge. Demonstrating the library's 50,000-record online catalog on a vintage 486 machine that boots up from a floppy disk, she commented, "We could use some extra hard drives."

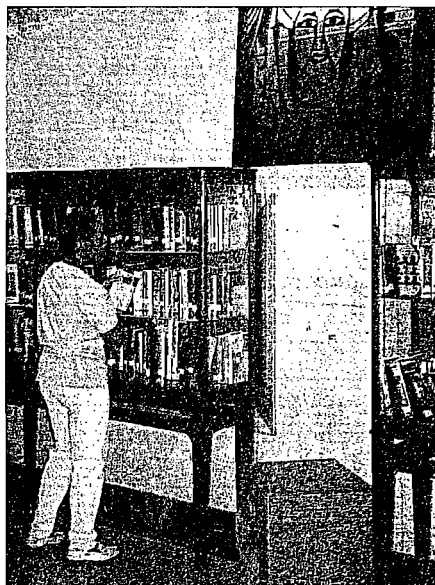
The library's Internet service is maintained by the Ministry of Culture. "In the beginning there was a deep distrust and even fear of the implications of the Internet for Cuba," Reyes explained. "Now people have a broader perspective." Reference librarians especially are reliant on the Web for updating outdated print materials.

Director Acosta said he is working toward offering limited public Internet access at the national and provincial libraries. "Very few individuals have computers at home," he said, "and online access is too expensive for anyone outside government agencies and cultural associations."

At this point, Acosta isn't worried about inappropriate Web



*Biblioteca Nacional Director Eliades Acosta enjoys American Libraries as Head of Automation Judith Reyes and Willamette College Library Director Larry Oberg look on.*



*The Minerva Club circulating collection in the national library.*

surfing: "The Biblioteca Nacional and the Cuban people have an ethical code concerning the viewing of pornography, violence, or racism on the Internet," he said. "In any case, access is so rare and expensive that no one would think of wasting any time on such things."

Since March 2000, the library has had an English version of its Web site ([www.lib.cult.cu/EnglishVersion/](http://www.lib.cult.cu/EnglishVersion/)) that offers news and facts about Cuban libraries. Head of Electronic

Publications Fernando Martínez Rivero said that the site jumped from 1,000 hits per month to 1,000 per week shortly after the translation was made available.

The library has been involved in a national reading program since March 1998 that aims to develop good reading habits in children at an early age. The plan has a nice head start because, as Acosta says, "essentially every school in the country [about 5,000] now has a library," a

## THE INDEPENDENT LIBRARIES CONTROVERSY

In the past two years, an American organization called the Friends of Cuban Libraries has been issuing press releases alleging that independent librarians were being arrested in Cuba and their collections confiscated. The founders of this Friends group are Jorge Sanguinetti, a commentator for the Miami-based Radio Martí, a U.S. government-funded station that broadcasts anti-Castro programming; and Robert Kent, a reference librarian at the New York Public Library.

A December 14 news release issued by Kent contained an appeal to ALA President Nancy Kranich by Dickinson College librarian Song-Yong, who was detained for six months in China on espionage charges (AL, March 2000, p. 14), to support the independent librarians. As a result, Kranich asked the International Relations Committee to report on the topic to Council at ALA's Midwinter Meeting in January.

### A visit to the independents

Larry R. Oberg, director of the Willamette (Oreg.) College Library, and Rhonda L. Neugebauer, now Latin American bibliographer at the University of California/Riverside, visited two independent libraries—both listed in one of Kent's postings—in Santiago de Cuba in March 2000 as part of a delegation of U.S. librarians organized by Neugebauer. This is what they told *American Libraries*:

"Located in a private home, the first consisted of two cases filled with books—one in the living room, another in a back bedroom—that appeared to contain some 300–400 volumes. The woman who tended the collection spoke freely of herself and her intentions. Her main objective, she said, was to make materials available to children, but was unable to show us any children's books.

"Many of her books were published in Cuba, although perhaps the bulk came from the United States, Mexico, and Spain. Her relatives live mostly in Miami, she said, and she herself regularly records and broadcasts statements on Radio Martí.

"The second library had no books at all. The family in the

modest flat said they had recently received U.S. exit visas and expected to leave shortly for Miami. Almost all of their materials had been distributed to sympathetic acquaintances in preparation for their departure.

"They had never collected books per se, they explained; relying instead upon deliveries of pamphlets, journal reprints, and other materials from the U.S. Interests Section in Havana. This type of material was better than books, they felt, because it supported their personal political beliefs.

"Neither of the two independent libraries we visited are marked or signed in any way. No circulation system was in place. Despite Kent's insistence that the independent librarians are our peers and colleagues, those we visited are uncredentialed and untrained and not librarians by any definition we might understand.

"The two independent librarians we met are self-professed political dissidents, and spoke openly and apparently without fear of reprisal. Either they or members of their families had been arrested, but both emphasized that these arrests had nothing to do with their library activities."

However, Robert Kent told AL that these individuals "provide books to

the Cuban people that are uncensored. Whether they have a professional degree or not, they are doing honor to our profession by upholding intellectual freedom."

The independent-library collection shown in the accompanying photograph is, according to Kent, what it looked like after security forces had seized a portion of it.

Kent also claims that the works of Cuban authors Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Reinaldo Arenas cannot be found on the shelves of the national, provincial, or public libraries. (However, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí Head of Research Margarita León supplied AL with the national library's holdings for those two authors: 13 titles for Cabrera and 20 for Arenas, all found in the public catalog.)

The Cuban independent libraries and intellectual freedom issues in Cuba are scheduled for an AL Conference Call feature in the April issue.



An independent library collection in Santiago de Cuba visited by Larry Oberg and Rhonda Neugebauer.

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statistic that reinforces the government's claim that Cuba has the highest literacy rate in Latin America.

One element of the program is the library's annual "To Read Martí" contest, in which students from grades 4 through 12 write essays on the life and works of José Martí (1853–1895), the library's namesake. Martí is the Cuban equivalent of George Washington, and his likeness is a frequent adornment on public buildings. Writers of the winning essays "receive a homage according to the resources" of the local school, but perhaps the real honor is their appearance in the national library's annual *Leer a Martí* volume.

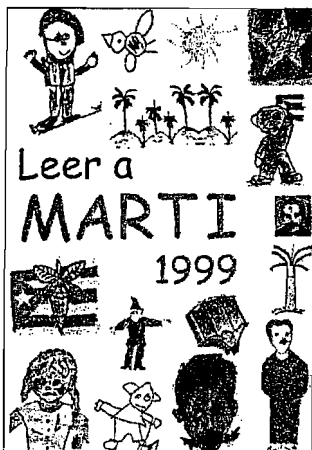
The library-based Minerva Clubs also promote reading. The first club was formed in 1997, at the national library; three years later, there were 25 with a total of 6,000 members. "There were 100,000 loans in the first seven months of the club's operation," Reyes affirmed, "and only two books were lost."

For an annual fee of 10 pesos (about 50 cents), students or adults can borrow books from the club's collection, which ranges from novels and biographies to history, culture, and art—not only in Spanish, but in English and other languages as well.

### *Those independent libraries*

Though the national library claims that there are no restrictions on the type of materials it collects—after all, the books belonging to former dictator Fulgencio Batista and his associates were acquired when he departed in 1959—there are those who say otherwise.

In 1998, economist and democratic activist Berta Mexidor set up the Félix Varela Library in Las Tunas as a "true cultural center without restrictions." Since then, similar libraries have sprung up and formed a collaborative Independent Libraries of Cuba Project, whose Web site ([www.cubanet.org/bibliotecas/proyecto.htm](http://www.cubanet.org/bibliotecas/proyecto.htm)) lists a total of 48, all in private homes.



*Winning essays of the "To Read Martí" contest appear in this annual collection, published by the national library.*

Political dissident Ramón Colas, Mexidor's husband, said in a November 8 Associated Press report that independent librarians "offer another cultural opinion . . . in a country accustomed to reading what its leaders want."

Director Acosta was explicit in his definition of the independent librarians: "They are not librarians or promoters of culture. Many do not have jobs. They want to defect to the United States, but they do not have the necessary background as political dissidents that the U.S. Interests Section requires. Becoming a persecuted librarian is one way for them to get the required documents."

Does the national library serve as a "true cultural center without restrictions?" Acosta insists it does. "There are people working in this library who do not support the revolution," he said, "and that's OK. We don't have a meeting to ask about politics before we hire someone—that's not my affair. It's not profes-

sional to mix political views with cultural service."

The stated goal of the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí is a familiar one—to bring literacy and access to information to all the Cuban people ([www.lib.cult.cu/EnglishVersion/reading.htm](http://www.lib.cult.cu/EnglishVersion/reading.htm)). "Cuban public libraries are suffering because of the blockade [the U.S. embargo]," Acosta said. "Daily operations are a struggle with very limited resources."

### *Acosta's dream*

What would he tell American librarians who were interested in Cuba?

"I would urge them to promote Cuban literature in their collections. In libraries in Houston, Stanford, and Berkeley I saw what little there was—the coverage was symbolic at best. Frequently there was an overbalance of books with the Miami-Cuban viewpoint or books from before 1959. If American children only have this point of view to go on, it is not accurate."

Looking through the December 2000 issue of *American Libraries*, Acosta ran across the "Celebrate Martin Luther King Holiday @ Your Library" insert. His reaction was quick and spontaneous: "I have a dream too—that friendship and mutual respect between our two peoples will continue to grow."

American librarians wishing to donate books (especially medical reference books), magazines, or videos to the José Martí or other Cuban libraries may send them to: Luly Duke, President, Fundación Amistad, 178 Springy Banks Rd., East Hampton, NY 11937. Call 631-324-0770, or visit [www.fundacionamistad.org](http://www.fundacionamistad.org) for further information. —AL Senior Editor George M. Eberhart, who visited the National Library while on holiday at the Havana Film Festival in December. ♦



*Students in a school library in Cárdenas.*

# Intellectual Freedom in Cuban Libraries: Does It Exist?

ANN SPARANESE AND ROBERT KENT  
DEBATE ACCESS, THE INDEPENDENT LIBRARIES,  
AND THE U.S. EMBARGO



**C**uban society seems to be opening up, compared to 40 years ago. The country has experienced a growth in international trade and an explosion in tourism that has drawn many U.S. citizens in recent years. Cuba has had a repressive government in the past, but are we now seeing a thaw? What role are Cuban libraries playing in information access and intellectual freedom?

*American Libraries* invited two librarians who are close to these issues. Robert E. Kent, a humanities reference librarian at the New York Public Library, represents an independent support group called the Friends of Cuban Libraries. Ann C. Sparanese, head of adult and young adult services at the Englewood (N.J.) Public Library, is active with ALA's Social Responsibilities Round Table. Both have been to Cuba several times and talked with various types of librarians there.

Moderated by *AL* Senior Editor George Eberhart, who visited Cuba last December (*AL*, Feb., p. 30–32), the conversation took place February 15. It has been edited for clarity and length.

**AL:** What is the current status of intellectual freedom in Cuba? Do public library users have access to materials like U.S. newspapers, nonrevolutionary histories of Cuba, or fiction written by dissidents?

**SPARANESE** We need to look at the rich cultural life that exists in Cuba. They have a national ballet, opera, film festivals, concerts, a hip-hop festival, jazz festivals. They have an annual book fair in Havana. These cultural events cost something like five pesos for Cubans to attend, which is equivalent to 25 U.S. cents. There is a rich intellectual life in the country. Their libraries are free to the public, and there are many of them all over the country.

**AL:** Do they offer access to, say, U.S. newspapers?

**KENT** Why don't Cuban libraries stock newspapers that reflect all points of view? Whether they're Cuban or not is irrelevant. Only one point of view is ever permitted in Cuban newspapers.

Every human rights organization that has studied the matter is unanimous in saying that no intellectual freedom exists in Cuba. For example, Amnesty International stated in its most recent report: "Freedom of expression, association, and assembly are severely restricted in law and practice. Those who attempt to express views, organize meetings, or form organizations that conflict with government policy are frequently subjected to punitive measures."

With regard to the availability of books by dissident Cuban writers, I would like to quote what Roberto Fernandez Retamar, a prominent Cuban cultural official, had to say on that subject. He was asked by a Spanish writer about censorship, and he replied: "When a writer asks the revolutionary authorities to what degree he is free, what he is really asking is to what degree he can be a counterrevolutionary."

**AL:** What are some of the authors or titles that might pose the government some problems if they appeared in libraries?

**KENT** There are many writers, both Cuban and foreign, whose works are either totally forbidden in libraries or held in special locked areas to which average Cubans are denied access. These include Octavio Paz, Mario Vargas Llosa, Václav Havel, George Orwell. What especially concerns many Cubans is the denial of access to internationally renowned Cuban writers who have incurred the displeasure of the government, including Reinaldo Arenas, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Zoé Valdés, María Elena Cruz Varela.

**SPARANESE** Eliades Acosta, the head of the Cuban National Library, categorically denies that this is so. As far as



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open shelves are concerned, there are closed collections in every library in the United States, including my own, which is just a small public library.

**KENT** But the purpose of closed shelves is not to prevent people from getting information.

**SPARANES** The purpose of these closed shelves in Cuba, if they exist, may not be that either. This rumored vault of forbidden books you always talk about, “El Infiernillo,” the Little Hell, is just a rumor based on something that somebody told you 15 years ago.

But the fact of the matter is, Cuba is not a stagnant society, any more than any other society. It’s changing. What might have been true 15 years ago isn’t necessarily true today. And I think that we have intellectual freedom concerns right here in our country; in our own libraries, in our own profession. Why are we holding Cuba up to a standard that is not even observed by most countries in the world, even our own?

Amnesty International has reports on virtually every country in the world. In fact, the year 2000 report on Cuba is shorter than the one on the United States. The Cuba report focuses, for the most part, on short-term detentions of

dissidents. The Amnesty report on the United States focuses on the death penalty, torture, racial profiling. So Amnesty reports, while they have their use, are done on every country on Earth, and Cuba’s is not especially long.

U.S. policy has directly influenced the fact that political liberties in Cuba are restricted. And the way it has done that is by passing laws. Section 109 of the Helms-Burton Act provides funding for the flow of enormous amounts of money into Cuba for the sole purpose of supporting organizations that favor the overthrow of the government. Our own country forbids foreign powers to financially contribute to our political process. The Cubans also passed a law that forbids funds and materials coming in from the United States through organizations like Freedom House, for which you yourself were a courier before you started the Friends of Cuban Libraries.

**KENT** You said that all of these groups are devoted to overthrowing the Cuban government. The subject of this debate is intellectual freedom. We’re not talking about violent operations. And the ALA’s Library Bill of Rights declares: “Materials should not be excluded because of the

## HOW TO TRAVEL OR SEND MATERIALS TO CUBA

THE U.S. GOVERNMENT PROHIBITS its citizens from spending dollars in Cuba, with some exceptions allowed after proper licenses have been obtained. Two federal agencies issue licenses for Cuba.

For travel, the U.S. Treasury Department issues licenses to individuals and groups with legitimate purposes for travel to Cuba. Requests for licenses are considered on a case-by-case basis for humanitarian travel, communications activities, educational exchanges, professional research, and similar activities. Institutional licenses may also be issued. Additional information may be found at the Office of Foreign Assets Control Web site ([www.ustras.gov/ofac/](http://www.ustras.gov/ofac/)). A nongovernmental resource with useful information about scientific exchange is [shr.aaas.org/rtt/policy.htm](http://shr.aaas.org/rtt/policy.htm).

Librarians traveling to Cuba to visit librarians are within the guidelines. If you use an appropriate travel agency such as Marazul-Tours ([www.marazultours.com](http://www.marazultours.com)), they will provide the license for travel.

For materials, the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Export Administration ([www.bxa.doc.gov](http://www.bxa.doc.gov)) issues licenses for shipments of nonrestricted materials to Cuba. You must have a receiving party in Cuba identified on the license application and a list of all types of materials to be shipped. License approvals take six to eight weeks.

Printed matter (such as a book shipment) does not require a license, but you must have a receiving party responsible for transport beyond port customs.

The Center for Marine Conservation, working with partners that include Michigan State University Libraries ([www.lib.msu.edu/drewes/](http://www.lib.msu.edu/drewes/)) and the Northeast Document

Conservation Center ([www.nedcc.org](http://www.nedcc.org)), has a license for shipping preservation and collection-storage materials to museums, archives, and libraries. They use the John A. Steer Company ([www.mobiusnewmedia.com/beta/steer/](http://www.mobiusnewmedia.com/beta/steer/)) for shipping materials.

You can mail letters and small packages to Cuba via DHL Worldwide Express ([www.dhl.com/main\\_index.html](http://www.dhl.com/main_index.html)).

Fundación Amistad, 178 Springy Banks Rd., East Hampton, NY 11937, 631-324-0770 ([www.fundacionamistad.org](http://www.fundacionamistad.org)), accepts donations of printed materials and can also assist with group travel arrangements.

To send materials specifically to the Cuban independent libraries, contact Robert Kent at [rkent20551@cs.com](mailto:rkent20551@cs.com).

Be sure to have a partner in Cuba who can receive materials donated, or work with an organization with an established partnership—the Fundación Amistad for printed matter, NEDCC for preservation materials, or MSU for printed matter or preservation materials.

Work with partners on the licensing and shipping. Shipping containers hold large amounts of materials, so partnering with others is cost-effective.

Spanish-language literature and children’s books, current medical materials, scientific journals, and current college-level research materials in all subject areas are needed. Although many Cubans have second-language skills, that second language may not be English. Spanish is preferred.

For further information, contact me at 517-432-7486 or [drewes@msu.edu](mailto:drewes@msu.edu).—Jeanne Drewes, assistant director for access and preservation, MSU Libraries.

origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation." Books are sent to official Cuban libraries and to the independent libraries from countries all over the world. And both the official librarians and the independent librarians have every right to accept any donation they like.

**SPARANESSE** Right, and they do. Oxfam International recently sent a delegation led by a Cuban-American state legislator from Massachusetts with 3,500 books to Cuba. Oxfam had none of their books censored or refused, including novels for young people, which to me are always controversial. Oxfam is an independent organization that accepts no Helms-Burton funds.

**KENT** Neither does the Friends of Cuban Libraries.

**SPARANESSE** The Friends, I don't know. But the so-called independent libraries definitely do.

**KENT** They're welcome to accept any donations they like.

**SPARANESSE** They are not allowed by Cuban law to receive materials funded and channeled through the Helms-Burton law.

**AL:** What are the Cuban independent libraries, how are they set up, and how many are there now?

**KENT** In early 1998, a group of Cubans decided to form independent libraries to challenge the Cuban government's monopoly on information, with the specific goal of providing uncensored books and materials reflecting perspectives on all sides of issues to the Cuban people. As confirmed by Amnesty International, they have been subjected to a campaign of persecution. Also, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions has conducted an intensive study that has confirmed the campaign of persecution in detail and has asked other library associations and interested organizations to also condemn the systematic persecution of Cuba's brave independent librarians. At last count, there were approximately 70 independent libraries.

**AL:** Do the independent libraries in Cuba function as lending libraries as we know the term?

**KENT** As confirmed by a reporter for the Associated Press, Vivian Sequera (*Washington Post*, Nov. 8, 2000), the libraries do offer books for loan.

**SPARANESSE** I think that they are really private libraries. In fact, they're the private libraries of people who are basically functionaries of opposition political parties. A public library has a sign, a public library has people going in and out, a public library has professionals working in it, a public library is not

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a private library with a few volumes on a shelf in the homes of political operatives who call themselves librarians to get sympathy for their cause.

**KENT** Every person in the world has a right to oppose censorship. Every person in the world has the right to open a library to the public. Just because the U.S. Librarian of Congress does not have a library degree, and just because approximately 40% of the members of the American Library Association do not have library degrees does not justify subjecting them to persecution.

**SPARANESSE** We are not talking about library degrees. We are talking about people who call themselves librarians or library workers. None of these people ever was a persecuted librarian. In fact, when our colleague Rhonda Neugebauer interviewed one of the owners of the alleged independent libraries (*AL*, Feb., p. 31), she found out that this was a person with a few books in her living room who happened to be a reporter for Radio Martí, a propaganda station operated by the U.S. She had no vocation as a librarian. This is not about libraries; it's not even about intellectual freedom.

**KENT** The political views of a librarian are irrelevant. It's not a factor that should be considered. Every librarian, regardless of race, religion, creed, national origin, or private

political belief is entitled to have a library offering uncensored books to the public.

**SPARANESSE** There's not even an indication that these books that they have in their house are any different from the books in the public library. Two librarians who visited there—Larry Oberg and Rhonda Neugebauer—testified to that.

**KENT** Or do we believe the eyewitness testimony of reporters for the *Washington Post* and Associated Press, who have written articles affirming that the independent librarians offer uncensored books which are prohibited in official Cuban libraries, they loan books, and they have been subjected to a campaign of persecution?

**AL:** To what extent does the U.S. embargo foster or inhibit free flow of information into Cuba?

**KENT** The only information blockade in Cuba is the one imposed by the Cuban government on its own people.

**SPARANESSE** Not true. All Americans can travel to Cuba, whether they want to participate in cultural tourism or just sit on the beach. It's the U.S. government that limits that. It's the 40-year state of war that the United States has imposed upon Cuba that has had the effect of limiting political rights in Cuba. Every human rights organization that talks about



Cuba mentions the embargo as something that doesn't help Cuban human rights—it hurts it, in fact.

**AL:** Robert, just to clarify your position, should American librarians support or protest the continued embargo?

**KENT** The Friends of Cuban Libraries is an organization concerned exclusively with intellectual freedom issues. We do not comment on international relations. We support intellectual freedom and we point out that informational materials such as books, magazines, newspapers, films, and posters are excluded from the U.S. trade embargo. It's not an intellectual freedom issue. Reporters have declared that Cuba is among the top 20 enemies of the Internet, and the president of Cuba's only legal university-student organization, Hassan Perez, has declared that "the Internet is the invention of the Devil."

**AL:** What should ALA do to support intellectual freedom in Cuba? What would you like to see? And not just the independent librarians. What would be the best response to the whole situation?

**KENT** The ALA has an obligation to support intellectual freedom and a specific obligation to support librarians who are being persecuted because of their brave advocacy of

intellectual freedom. ALA should follow the example of the Canadian Library Association and condemn the Cuban government's persecution of the independent librarians.

**AL:** Has SRRT taken a stand on this?

**SPARANESSE** Yes. We have a resolution on our Web site. We call for an end to the embargo; we call for continuing exchanges with Cuban libraries. But as far as ALA is concerned, I think that the International Relations Committee made a very wise decision at Midwinter—and Council was very wise to accept it (*AL*, Mar., p. 72)—to encourage more exchanges between Cuban and American librarians to see what is really going on there. I think there has to be participation in ALA by Cuban librarians. It would be good to invite them to participate in panels and deliver papers at conferences.

**KENT** Including independent librarians?

**SPARANESSE** No, because they are not librarians. I thought that the discussion at IRC on how the embargo discourages Cuban participation in ALA was very helpful, and I think they're on the right road.

**AL:** Thank you both for participating in this Conference Call. Your debate may encourage our readers to visit Cuba and find out what is going on for themselves. ♦