

LIBRARIAN FIGHTS FOR JOB LOST OVER CRITICISM OF JOURNALS CHOSEN  
Oklahoma oil town in squabble about control of reading matter  
--Court suit filed in firing

By F. A. Behymer  
A staff correspondent of the Post-Dispatch

Bartlesville, Okla.--Citizens of this oil-blessed city, counting their blessings one by one but weighing against them the value of the civil liberties, are waiting for the district court to say whether the City Commission can control the public library and exclude therefrom "subversive" publications.

Denied a decision by Judge James T. Shipman, who disqualified himself in deference to the divided sentiments of the community over the dismissal of the library board and discharge of Miss Ruth W. Brown, librarian, the defenders of civil liberties are strengthening their position and preparing to carry on "the Battle of Bartlesville" if the district court decision is against them. The question that, if necessary, they will carry to the higher courts is whether they shall have the right to read, without restrictions, such publications as the Nation and the New Republic. Over the question there is sharp dissension between city officials and the members of "citizens' committee" on the one hand and a defense committee of the friends of Miss Brown who are asking the court to reinstate her and the old library board members who supported her in her refusal to remove such publications from the library shelves.

Ousters hesitate to talk.

City officials and members of the "citizens' committee", although they are presumed to have at least the tacit support of the powerful Phillips Petroleum Corp. and the Cities Service Co., don't like to talk about the civil liberties case. They are allergic to publicity as something that might hurt the town. There are indications that the high command of the oil industry deplores the fuss that has been made over such a little issue as control of the public library.

Members of the defense committee and others who have come to the help of Miss Brown talk freely about it, but on the other side shush is the word.

The City Commission, whose action has been challenged in the district court, is composed of Mayor E. S. Dunaway, who is in the abstract business; Milo L. Margensau, public relations man for the Cities Service Co.; E. F. Kindsvater, manager of the engineering department of the Cities Service Co.; Joe Henton, who runs a filling station, and W. A. Forrest, a grocer. At the time when they passed an ordinance taking over control of the library they did not hold cards as patrons.

Mayor Dunaway is out of town. He has, however, placed himself on record, in an oration that he delivered at a meeting of the City Commission on March 6, at which friends of Miss Brown were booed and heckled and called Communists. The mayor on that occasion dramatically poured oil on the troubled waters.

"These are times," he said, "that try men's souls and men's minds as they have never before been tried in the annals of our history. The whole world is in a state of confusion, engaged in a titanic struggle between power-crazed totalitarian groups on the one hand and freedom-loving individuals on the other in a struggle which ultimately will determine whether our government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall continue to exist or be forever banished from the face of the earth and be succeeded by feudalism, absolute monarchy, Communism, Fascism, Nazism, or some other totalitarian or authoritarian form of government."



That being the case, he suggested that the Library Board should make a further investigation and come back with a report at the next meeting of the commissioners.

#### Race issue also raised.

About 40 men and women had turned up at a previous commission meeting. Mrs. C. S. Warren, pushed forward as spokesman, told former Mayor R. H. Hudson, since deceased, and the four commissioners about the dark doings at the library. The Nation, barred by the New York City Board of Education, was there. What was more, Miss Brown had been active in race relations. On that point she called as a witness Druggist Mull, who testified that on one occasion Miss Brown had appeared at his lunch counter with two Negro women.

Hudson, said the drug store incident was Miss Brown's personal affair, and she thought, too, that the commission didn't have anything to do with how she ran the library, but suggested that the committee might take it up with the library board.

Russell Davis, president of the library board, called a meeting. The dissidents demanded that the offending publications be removed. The board members insisted that in the interest of balanced information they should be retained.

At the next meeting of the City Commission reports were made by the library board and the objectors, who called themselves a citizens' committee. That was when supporters of the library board and Miss Brown were booed, heckled and called Communists and Dunaway the new mayor, delivered his oration.

#### Library bill of rights.

When another meeting was held, the library board took its stand on the Library Bill of Rights of the Council of the American Library Association:

"There should be the fullest practicable provision of material presenting the problems and issues of our times, international, national and local; and books or other reading matter of sound factual authority should not be proscribed or removed from library shelves because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval." Therefore, the "Nation" and the "New Republic" should be retained "as essential to effect that balance of differing viewpoints on controversial subjects which should characterize a good library."

The commissioners had nothing to say to that at the time, but at their next meeting they revoked the old ordinance and passed a new one giving them authority to fire the old library board, which was promptly done. That left Miss Brown up in the air. The new board might retain her if it saw fit. In view of her nearly 31 years of service, it might be moved to do so. That was how it stood when Miss Brown met Mayor Dunaway on the street. He told her he and the commissioners wanted to talk with her at a private meeting. She met with them and expressed her willingness to answer all questions, but if they were of a personal nature she would like to have them in writing. She refused to answer questions that she considered of such a nature. She was asked if she had signed a loyalty oath. She said she had never seen one, but would sign one then and there. The commissioners did not have one handy. She was not a Communist, she declared. She agreed with the old board that the Nation and the New Republic were not subversive, but if the new board ordered them removed, she would remove them. She refused to define her attitude toward racial relations unless the questions were put in writing. That was when Commissioner Forrest made his point that race relations might be according to the Bible and the Constitution but they didn't do it that way in Bartlesville.



## New board chairman's views.

E. R. Christopher, chairman of the new board, who is postmaster, deprecated any significance being attached to his acceptance of the appointment. It was just a civic appointment that he had accepted as a public service, like serving on a committee of the Chamber of Commerce. The library had become run down and he thought it was a chance to build it up. Miss Brown was a school teacher before she became a librarian, and he understood that had never had library training, except the experience she had had in her more than 30 years of service. Until this thing came up, he had never read the Nation. Later he had looked at one issue. Personally, he had no objection to it, but there was a question whether there was enough interest in it to justify spending the taxpayers' money for it. However, the board had decided to renew the subscription and keep it at the librarian's desk to check the demand for it. City Manager Jones was the man to make any statement about it.

City Manager Jones had nothing to say. It was not an administration matter. Members of the library board were the ones to do the talking. All he had to do with it was that the library board had asked him to advise Miss Brown that she had been discharged.

Mrs. Warren, chairman of the citizens' committee, was slightly ill at ease because she, just a housewife, had been practically pressed into the position. She would like to have it understood, though, that Miss Brown was not dismissed for racial or subversive reasons. It was entirely on account of her insubordination in refusing to answer the commissioners' questions unless they were put in writing. She was not asked if she had refused to remove those magazines from the shelves. If she had been, she would have given the same answer. The magazines had not been removed by the new librarian. They had merely been placed under her desk. You could get them if you wanted them. After all, the question was whether the new ordinance was legal, and she would be much obliged if her name was left out of it.

Mrs. Warren's committee has as its secretary Henrietta B. Wills. Other members of the committee are Mrs. Bessie Emysor, Mrs. J. H. Ribble, Mrs. M. J. Kirwan, Mrs. Frank Sissons and W. D. McGinley. Mrs. Warren and her committee claim to represent "a large group," not more specifically defined. The defense committee claims to have the backing of about 200 persons in its fight and in the litigation that has been started.

Members of the defense group say the fight has been fomented in part by some members of the American Legion, Pro-American, which is a Republican women's club, Daughters of the American Revolution and United Daughters of the Confederacy.

## Librarian had no contract.

Miss Brown had no contract and was not under civil service. Her salary latterly had been \$3000 a year. When she was discharged on July 16 her pay was continued to the first of August.

Officials and others who were concerned to have the Nation and the New Republic barred make much of the claim that these publications have not actually been thrown out but only removed from the open shelves where anybody could pick them up and read them. The subscriptions have been continued, but they are in the discreet hands of the librarian and available to mature patrons. The mature patrons, however, complain that they are made uncomfortable by the scrutiny to which they are subjected when they ask for those publications. Or maybe they only imagine it. It may be that the fear of being put down as Communists makes them sensitive.



The case, brought in the names of Miss Brown and Mrs. Arlene Essary against the mayor, city commissioners, city manager and members of the new library board, asserts that the new ordinance is null and void, that the old board is still fully qualified and acting and Ruth W. Brown is the duly appointed librarian and entitled to custody of the books and records. The case will be heard Nov. 9 on an order to show cause by an outside judge.

Miss Brown, sedate and demure, deprived of her livelihood at the age of 59, sits these autumn days in her cottage near the library and waits.