August 1, 1950

Dear Intellectual Freedom Committee, Personnel Board, and Executive Board:

The enclosed data on Bartlesville, Oklahoma is hereby called to your attention. As you will see, I learned of the trouble in March, but under the pressure of revising the loyalty resolution, I had time only to answer the request of Mr. Davis, Library Board Member. My first question to you is: What criticisms do you have of my action in thus personally acting for the Intellectual Freedom Committee, and do you approve of my letter to Mr. Davis?

Now I have just received Mr. Davis' reply announcing he is no longer a Board member. I also received from The Nation editors the following:

... Is not Miss Brown's case one which is of direct interest to the American Library Association, and should be fought in her behalf by the Association?

If you think the matter is one to be taken up by your organization, will you not take whatever steps you think necessary and let me know. ...

What is your advice? Who knows Mr. Gourley of Tulsa? Do you think he would take the initiative in establishing an Oklahoma Committee on Intellectual Freedom? Would he investigate the accuracy of this report? Should the Personnel Board investigate the dismissal of Miss Brown? Should the Library Journal carry an article about Bartlesville's Library problem? What else might A.L.A. do?

Sincerely yours,

D. K. Berninghausen
D. K. Berninghausen, Chairman
A. L. A. Committee on Intellectual Freedom

DKE/es
March 15, 1950

Committee on Intellectual Freedom,
50 East Huron Street,
Chicago 11, Illinois

Dear Sirs:

Mr. James E. Gourley, Tulsa Librarian, has advised us that your Committee, of which he has been a member for a long period of time, has available material from your study of "The New Republic" and "The Nation". Could you make this available to us as quickly as possible, please?

The Bartlesville Public Library is under attack from a small but insistent group over the presence of these magazines on our shelves. This group has made loose and public charges of "subversive literature" in general being handled by our library, and have made specific complaints in regard to "The New Republic", "The Nation", and "Soviet Russia Today".

"The New Republic" and "The Nation" are no recent acquisitions to our publications list. We have felt that while they might be considered as controversial, they did not, even as such, weigh too heavily in the balance of the list of over sixty publications to which we subscribe. Many of our other library patrons consider these magazines stimulating and provocative additions to our list.

This matter is extremely serious and we would be grateful for any immediate help you can give us.

Yours very truly,
/s/
Russell W. Davis, Chairman,
Board of Directors,
Bartlesville Public Library.

* * * * *

March 24, 1950

Mr. Russell W. Davis
1542 S. Dewey Avenue
Bartlesville, Oklahoma

Dear Mr. Davis:

The American Library Association deplores the increasing number of attacks upon freedom of inquiry by volunteer censors. The enclosed article and speech will provide a partial background from which you may view your specific problem on "The Case of the Nation", Almost all librarians undoubtedly oppose any attempts to "close any of the pathways to information" for Americans.

The volunteer censors may be very sincere—but mistaken patriots. Possibly they cannot be made to understand that their proposed censorship is characteristic of undemocratic societies, has no place in freedom-loving America, and if allowed will destroy our democratic way of life. What can you do, then?

The most constructive approach, I suggest, is to call a meeting of your Library Board and discuss the Library Bill of Rights and the Traditional function of libraries as disseminators of information on all sides of controversial questions. If
the board can agree that this official statement of the American Library Association's policy on censorship is a good one, then perhaps you may wish to adopt it as the official policy for your library. If this is done then the act should be widely publicized.

This has been done at Grand Rapids, Michigan, Worcester, Massachusetts, Kalamazoo, Michigan, and several other places. For a summary of the value of publicity as a weapon, see "Publicity Wins Intellectual Freedom," ALA Bulletin, February, 1949, pp. 73-75 and Library Journal, November 1, 1948.

Our committee has made no specific study or report on The New Republic. In general, the principles which apply to the Nation also suggest the value of including the New Republic in the holdings of American libraries. However, I want to clearly state that I do not think any A.L.A. body should assume the authority to tell any local library what materials it must buy or hold.

Soviet Russia Today is a different kind of problem. In 1947, before I was a member of the Committee on Intellectual Freedom the committee studied this publication, and concluded that while it was frankly friendly to Russia and emphasized the fact that Russians were human beings much like other human beings, there was no reason to exclude it from library shelves. We would undoubtedly say the same today.

I hope that these materials will suggest the general approach to your problem. Our committee cannot advise specific actions without a close and thorough analysis of the situation. It is up to local people to decide the steps which should be taken. I hope that you will find ways to win this argument as the Scarsdale, New York community did. (See enclosed clipping) Where attempts at censorship occur, the proper handling often produces a clearer understanding of the function of public libraries and the value of America's traditional free inquiry.

You may use this letter or the articles enclosed in any way you choose. See also September, 1948 ALA Bulletin.

Sincerely yours,

D. K. Berninghausen, Chairman
A.L.A. Committee on Intellectual Freedom

* * * * *

July 24, 1950

Mr. D. K. Berninghausen, Chairman,
A. L. A. Committee on Intellectual Freedom
Cooper Union Library,
Cooper Square,
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Berninghausen:

The former members of the Board of the Bartlesville Free Public Library wish to join me in thanking you for the material you supplied us to answer recent public and unjustified criticism of our library. The same small segment of citizens have been busily engaged in criticising other local organizations and their churches.
The City Commissioners, hoping to resolve the prolonged argument, appointed an entirely new Board on July 10th, after drafting and passing a new city ordinance with emergency clause attached.

I am returning your New York Herald-Tribune clipping dated October 16th, 1949 on the Scarsdale situation. This is the only item which you indicated was to be returned.

Again thanking you, I am

Sincerely yours,

/s/
R.W. Davis

* * * * *
July 26, 1950

Miss Freda Kirchwey, Editor
The Nation
20 Vesey Street
New York 7, New York

Dear Miss Kirchwey:

By reason of my membership over a period of years in The Nation Associates, I ask your attention to a recital of some events which I am sure will be of interest to you.

Bartlesville, Oklahoma is a town of some 19,000 population in the northeastern part of the state. It is the home office of two oil companies, Phillips Petroleum Company and Cities Service Oil Company, and a large part of the working population is employed by one or the other of the two companies. Politically, it is predominately conservative, although the large number of young scientists and technicians working for the oil companies forms a core for a substantial minority of liberals. So far as racial attitudes are concerned, the town is typically border-state. Within the last six months, the town has been afflicted by a ruthless and devious campaign to suppress civil liberties here, conducted by a group, who call themselves a Citizens Committee, composed of a small segment of the local American Legion chapter, members of "pro-America", a local Republican women's club, and members of the local Daughters of the American Revolution and United Daughters of the Confederacy chapters.

The first target of this group was the local Y.W.C.A. Over a period of years, that organization had put into effect a limited interracial program, comprising the holding of meetings of the teen age Y club of the segregated local Negro school in the Y.W.C.A. building, on the same basis as that upon which meetings of the white girls' clubs are held there; a monthly meeting of all officers of the nonsegregated meeting of all members of the Y teen clubs. The Citizens Committee appeared before the Y.W.C.A. Board of Directors and demanded the discontinuance of this program, and the discharge of the head of the administrative staff. The Y.W.C.A. Board referred the matter to the vote of the membership, which approved the established interracial program by a large majority. The Citizens Committee is now attempting to impose its demands by means of pressure exerted by the local Community Chest through which the Y.W.C.A.'s funds are received.

The next target was the City Library. Miss Ruth Brown, who has served the community efficiently as City Librarian for 35 years, has long been active in local groups interested in effecting civil and economic rights for the town's Negro population. The so-called Citizens Committee appeared at a meeting of the Board of City Commissioners, complaining of Miss Brown's activities, and of "subversive" literature in the Library. The matter was referred to the Library Board, which met with the Citizens Committee. At that meeting, no complaint was made concerning the Librarian, but three publications were alleged by the Committee to be subversive: "The Nation", "The New Republic", and "Soviet Russia Today". The ground of complaint against "The Nation" was its ban by the New York Board of Education.

The Library Board formulated a report to the City Commissioners, in which the inclusion on the periodical list of the three publications was defended, and this report was presented at an open meeting of the City Commissioners on March 6. That meeting was very close to a riot. Speakers in support of the Library Board's position
were hissed, heckled, and charged with being Communists. The Mayor who presided, was either unable or unwilling to preserve order. At its conclusion, the Library Board was requested to investigate further, and report back to the Commissioners.

The Library Board then proceeded to make a thorough appraisal of the contents of the Library's periodical and political and sociological sections, and a thorough investigation of the operation of the Library. The report to the City Commissioners affirmed the propriety of inclusion of "The Nation" and "The New Republic" on the periodical list by virtue of their appraisal in accordance with standards approved by the American Library Association, their inclusion in the subscription lists of other public and school libraries in this area, and their general character as reputable periodicals necessary to preserve a proper balance with respect to conflicting viewpoints in the light of other publications on the Library's subscription list. "Soviet Russia Today" which is published by the Friends of Soviet Russia and had been received by the Library without charge, was removed from the shelves on the ground that it was of insufficient value, from the standpoint of interest and information, to justify occupation of the limited space available to the Library.

At the City Commissioners' meeting at which the Library Board's final report was submitted, the Citizens Committee also presented a report. The substance of their report was that: (1) "Soviet Russia Today", "The Negro Digest" and "Consumers' Research" are subversive because they have been cited by the Tenney Committee in California; (2) "The Nation" and "The New Republic" are subversive because some issues carry advertisements for pornographic books and books published by publishing houses cited by the Tenney Committee or the United States House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee, because a signed book review in one issue of "The Nation" discussed a book written by a homosexual, and because the authors, including Carey McWilliams, of some articles in these publications have been cited by the Tenney or other investigating committees. The City Commissioners have not at any time discussed with the Library Board its report, the report of the Citizens Committee, or the operation of the Library.

In the meantime, at least one of the town's oil companies had intervened. Employees of Phillips Petroleum Company who had been vocal in support of the Library Board were instructed to be silent. Two employees who had been active in interracial activities in the community were transferred to other locations; one of these two was advised that his activities in this regard constituted the reason for his transfer.

The Library Board had been administering the City Library as an autonomous board appointed by the City Commissioners, under the provision of a state statute. On June 15, the City Commissioners, purportedly under the authorization of the city's home rule charter, enacted an ordinance placing the administration of the Library under the control and direction of the Commissioners, with an advisory Library Board. It is my opinion that this ordinance is legally invalid. The members of the old Library Board were relieved of responsibility, and a new Board, consisting of representatives and supporters of the so-called Citizens Committee, was appointed. On July 25, the services of Miss Brown, City Librarian, were terminated by the City Commissioners.

These events, in my judgment, have significance beyond their local impact. They are similar to events which have been occurring throughout this middle western area. In Newkirk, Oklahoma, a private citizen recently felt impelled to call a public meeting to deny that Communism had been discussed at a social gathering in his
home. As you know, Gerald L. K. Smith lives and maintains his headquarters at Tulsa, Oklahoma, which is in this immediate area. It is interesting to speculate as to whether or not local agitators are directed or aided by his organization.

I shall appreciate it greatly if you will advise me whether or not there are any national or state organizations interested in civil liberties which might aid those of us in Bartlesville who desire to continue the fight here. I hesitate to call upon the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or the American Civil Liberties Union, the only such organizations with which I am familiar, by reason of the fact that they have been consistently and perhaps irrevocably branded as pro-Communist in this community.

In the event you desire to publish any part of this letter, I request that you withhold my name and initials. ...