

Bartlesville Part 2

August 1, 1950

Mr. David Berninghausen
The Library
Cooper Union
New York 3, New York

My dear Mr. Berninghausen:

...
Since my letter to Miss Kirchwey was written, a small group of interested persons has been making a strenuous attempt to place the facts of the situation before the public. Both of the local newspapers have refused to carry news stories concerning the Library controversy, beyond a bare recital of the facts that the Librarian has been discharged, the Assistant Librarian has resigned in protest, and the Library is being operated by temporary, nonprofessional personnel. One of the local newspapers refused a paid advertisement calling attention to the civil liberties issue involved; the advertisement was carried by the other local newspaper, without comment. Through our efforts, a reporter from the Tulsa Daily World came to Bartlesville and interviewed a number of persons on both sides of the controversy, but no story has been published, and we have been advised by a representative of that publication that by reason of the paper's policy, the story will not be published. A full report of the controversy and its background was furnished by our group to the Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Daily Oklahoman. On July 31, a very short story was published in that paper, which either by design or inadvertently, implied that subversive material had been found in the Bartlesville Library, and that the discharged Librarian was responsible therefor.

Yesterday, July 31, "The Nation" and "The New Republic" were removed from the shelves of the Bartlesville Public Library.

We feel that it is essential that the facts of this controversy be published, in order that the citizens of this community may be advised of what has transpired, and in order that those responsible may understand that the denial of Constitutional rights to our citizens has significance beyond the boundaries of our town. If you can be of any assistance to us in this regard, we shall be indeed most grateful.

We hope to file legal action sometime this week for the purpose of contesting the validity of the City ordinance under which the administration of the City Library was taken over by the City Commissioners from the autonomous Library Board previously responsible for its operation.

Those of us in Bartlesville who are concerned with this matter are without experience in matters of this kind, and we shall appreciate greatly any advice or assistance you can give us.

Yours very truly,

Attorney at Law

(Name omitted for the protection of the writer who fears loss of position if correspondence is made public. This, of course, makes it all the more necessary to have a well-known librarian in Oklahoma check on the facts. I will, of course, give the name of this writer to anyone trying to investigate for us. DKB)

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August 3, 1950

Miss Ruth Brown, Librarian
Bartlesville
Oklahoma

Dear Miss Brown:

Reports have reached the Committee on Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association that magazines have been removed from the Bartlesville Public Library under pressure and that you have been removed from your position as librarian.

I am sure that this must be very painful to you, and I extend my sympathy and assurance that the American Library Association will do everything possible to help you. However, we need facts. I am enclosing the facts we now have. Perhaps you are not aware that yours is not the only community which is having difficulties of this kind. Did you read the article in the Library Journal of November 1, 1948 on the Los Angeles, California attempt to create a board of censors? This attempt was defeated.

Do you know that A.L.A. has a Board on Personnel and Tenure which will be willing to investigate and help you: Do you know that publicity is the best weapon against censors that you have?

In Baltimore when Miss Elizabeth Haas was automatically fired because she refused to sign a loyalty oath on conscientious grounds the ALA Bulletin carried a short story on the incident. Immediately three good public libraries offered Miss Haas a position. Perhaps you do not need a new position, but I want you to know that you have friends.

I would much appreciate it if you would check the enclosed packet of information, which has been sent to the ALA Executive Board, the Committee on Intellectual Freedom, and the Board on Personnel and Tenure, to see if it is accurate. If it is absolutely accurate, and you and Mr. Davis will corroborate it, perhaps some national publicity will help you and your side in the controversy.

We stand ready to help you, but we do not wish to embarrass you against your wish. We prefer to advise rather than to try to act in any way other than to gain publicity for your problem. The actual fight must be made by the enlightened citizens in your community.

Sincerely yours,

/s/

David K. Berninghausen, Chairman
ALA Committee on Intellectual Freedom

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Received:
August 7, 1950

D.K. Berninghausen, Chairman
A.L.A. Committee on Intellectual Freedom
Cooper Union Library
Cooper Square
New York 3, New York

Dear Mr. Berninghausen:

Thank you for your letter of August 3rd. I return the packet of information which is correct except as to my years of service (30) and which we will be glad to have you use in any national publicity.

Mr. Davis will also write corroborating my statement.

Very truly yours,
/s/
Ruth W. Brown

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August 7th, 1950

Dear Mr. Berninghausen:

I have delivered the enclosure in your letter of August 3rd, which came Air Mail Saturday afternoon during my absence. You undoubtedly will receive the answer about the time this is written and mailed.

If the Committee decides to follow your suggestion and submit an article for publication by the Library Journal, I feel it would be best if you were to write it from the facts. More nearly absolute objectivity and honesty will be attained if some person not close to the situation prepares the article from the information. I will be very glad to forward our complete files containing the original of our letter from the Department of Justice in response to my first inquiry in March, and full copies with attachments of all our reports to the City Commissioners.

This information might be of interest even if your members decide against the article, and if the data would be of general help to other Library Boards facing like circumstances, we would be glad to make the file available to you at once.

When you are finished will you return the enclosed clipping in re the temporary operation of the library? There is no hurry.

Very truly yours,
/s/
R.W. Davis

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Clipping from the Bartlesville Enterprise, Bartlesville, Oklahoma, July 27, 1950.
(Sent by R. W. Davis)

CITY LIBRARY STILL OPEN; MISS BROWN HAS STATEMENT

One active and one retired school teacher will continue to operate the city library from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. until permanent personnel can be obtained, Miss Virginia Lasley, one of the school teachers reported Thursday.

Miss Lasley will serve as temporary librarian and her assistant will be Miss Thelma Zinn, presently a teacher at Central high school.

Miss Lasley is a former teacher at College-High and Central High School. She reported that she and Miss Zinn were secured by the library board to work in the library.

The two women were named in order to allow the library to continue functioning despite the discharge Tuesday night of Miss Ruth Brown, former librarian, by city commissioners and the resignation of Mrs. A. R. Riggs, assistant librarian Wednesday.

The policy of temporary personnel in the library until permanent employes can be appointed was decided on at an informal meeting of the new library board Wednesday night at Civic Center, at which City Manager E. E. Jones was present.

MRS. RIGGS SAID in explanation of her resignation that she was quitting "in sympathy with the discharge of Miss Brown."

The following statement by Miss Brown, relative to her discharge Tuesday, was released Wednesday:

"I HAVE NOT BEEN advised by the City Commissioners of the reasons for termination of my employment as City Librarian. Neither during my interview with the City Commissioner on July 25, nor at any other time, have the Commissioners, the City Manager, or any other person told me that my services as City Librarian have been unsatisfactory. I believe, as do many others, that my dismissal is attributable to certain of my personal opinions and outside activities which are distasteful to members of the Board of City Commissioners.

I have always believed that discrimination on account of race, creed, or color is contrary to democratic and Christian principles; and I have tried to live as a Christian in a Democracy in accordance with this belief. This has in no way interfered with my duties as City Librarian; for the recently discharged Library Board found my work completely satisfactory. The newly appointed Library Board has given me no reason to believe they have found it otherwise."

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For your files and the record, I am quoting below the action taken by the Executive Board at its meeting on 22 July 1950 when discussing the work of the Committee on Intellectual Freedom and the Board on Personnel Administration.

VOTED, That the implementation of the Loyalty resolution be within the province of the Board on Personnel Administration.

VOTED, That the powers of ALA boards and committees, specifically the Committee on Intellectual Freedom and the Board on Personnel Administration, in the areas of responsibility assigned, be limited to observe, investigate, and to calling attention to the pertinent policy statement, such as the Loyalty Resolution and the Library Bill of Rights; that where more delegated action is required the board or committee be charged with making a recommendation to the Executive Board for action; where the Executive Board disagrees on a correspondence vote, the matter must be held over until the next meeting of the Executive Board.

Sincerely yours,
/s/
John Mackenzie Cory
Executive Secretary

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