

# City Wins Court Library Decision

The right of the city of Bartlesville to legislate a librarian out of her job in a dispute over purported Communist publications was upheld by the Oklahoma State Supreme Court.

Miss Ruth Brown, sued in 1950, lost her attempt to get reinstatement. The ruling was determined solely on the question of whether the city council had the right to create a new library governing board and appoint a librarian. The question of publications did not enter the Supreme Court case.

A former schoolteacher, Miss Brown had been the librarian for 20 years. Under an old library ordinance, she had a library board of six members to advise and consult her, but through the years Miss Brown appeared to need such as-

sistance less and less and the board meetings became but an annual session on budgetary matters.

Such was the situation when, in 1948, Miss Brown and a group holding similar views organized the Committee for the Practice of Democracy, and affiliated with the Congress of Racial Equality. The organization of the chapter, which had the objective of eliminating segregation, created no stir at first in Bartlesville.

In a statement made at the time Miss Brown talks how the first resentment began to grow. "C.O.R.E. believes in the direct, non-violent approach to the race problem," she explained. "It has a program of action to break down the barriers of segregation in restaurants and movie houses and similar places. Last fall (in 1949)

we decided it was time for action here."

The committee sponsored a speech by Bayard Rustin, a Negro Quaker, whom his supporters described as a "peace pacifist" and leader in the Fellowship of Reconciliation movement, but was labeled a draft dodger and subversive by many citizens who opposed his appearance. A grade school building was rented for his address but because of the resulting clamor, the school board canceled its use and the meeting was held in a private home.

About this time the opening of the new Y.W.C.A. building pushed the race arguments along. The "Y" had had a limited program for Negroes, two "teen age" groups using the buildings for meetings. When pressure was put on the

"Y" board to eliminate this phase of the program, Miss Brown's voice was among the most outspoken, decrying the proposal.

On Feb. 17, a group of citizens appeared before the city commission to complain that Miss Brown's operation of the library was inefficient, and cited what it contended was subversive literature, naming the "Nation New Republic" and "Soviet Russia Today." Some comment was made about the librarian's activities in connection with the race question.

Miss Brown's critics came from no one organization, although most were members of the American Legion, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Some were members of Bartlesville's older and more substantial families.

Mayor R. H. Hudson, who since has died, told the group that Miss Brown's race views were her own affair, but that the other matter might better be taken up with the library board.

The citizens' committee sought the removal of the magazines cited but the board contended they should be retained in the interests of maintaining a balance in reading material. Both groups then filed reports with the city commission, culminating in a bitter cross-fire session with the commission in which Communist and Fascist and assorted insults were flung back and forth.

The board refused to fire Miss Brown, though there was criticism of her literature and her attitude.

On July 24, 1950 a new library ordinance was passed permitting the city commission to fire the old

board and appoint a new one, which they did at once, with E. R. Christopher as chairman.

Miss Brown was fired on July 25, 1950, by the commission on a charge of insubordination, and Virginia Lasley was appointed as new librarian.

On Sept. 12th Miss Brown sued the city of Bartlesville for her job. Joining Miss Brown in her unsuccessful Supreme Court case was Mrs. Darlene Essary, a member of the old board.

District Judge Jess Miracle, Okemah, heard the case on September 12, after Judge James T. Shipman, Bartlesville, was disqualified. Miracle gave the same ruling the Supreme Court did today.

The case was appealed to the Supreme Court on December 11, 1950.