

THE LIBRARY—1941

*A statement of policy adopted by the Council
of the American Library Association*

THE American Library Association believes it is the privilege and duty of every library and library agency in North America to make its books and services contribute in all possible ways to the preservation and improvement of the democratic way of life.

Public libraries, large and small, urban and rural; libraries in schools, colleges and universities; research libraries; special libraries—each one should make its services indispensable to its own community and to the country; and each member of every library board and staff must share the responsibility.

Libraries must help the unskilled, unemployed man preparing himself to hold a job in an essential industry; the skilled worker preparing himself for greater responsibility; the engineer re-educating himself for defense activities; the designers of airplanes, motors, tanks, guns and ships; the research workers in science and industry; the farm worker who must adjust himself to new economic conditions.

The wars now being waged are not merely against nations and races. They have as their aim the destruction of ideas as well, even in those countries not engaged in military combat. The freedoms and principles which represent the highest achievements of civilized society are menaced, from abroad and at home. Libraries are inevitably involved in this war of ideas.

Unusual opportunities exist to increase understanding of what democracy is, what its achievements and failures have been; and above all what its future can be if it

again becomes, in the minds of all, not something achieved, but a way of making life what we wish it to be. Because some knowledge of the governmental systems with which it is in conflict is essential to such understanding, reading should be encouraged and facilitated not only on democracy, but on other ideologies. Propaganda against democracy should not be feared and avoided but confronted with evidence and informed interpretation.

The war and its causes, our own country's relation to it, aid to Great Britain, hemispheric solidarity, problems of the Pacific, social reconstruction at home, the kind of peace we want, the kind of world organization—these and scores of other wartime subjects need public consideration and reasoned discussion in the light of facts available in books. It is the duty of the library also to be aware of local problems and to give creative help in their solution.

The present situation calls for a positive program of stimulation and leadership. Libraries have an opportunity to promote the reading of thought-provoking books on socially significant questions; they have an obligation to make it difficult for people to escape the influence of such books. It is as essential for librarians to know what subjects are vital as to know what books are good. A generous provision of books and services on all aspects of current problems and their historical antecedents is a major obligation of the library in times like these.

Intellectual freedom is never permanently assured. It is especially endangered by war. The right of the citizen to find in his library the best material on all sides of controversial public questions must be protected.

The library cannot work alone, but must cooperate with all other agencies concerned with research, education, training and the diffusion of ideas. Schools, colleges, debating clubs, forums, organized groups of many kinds—all now need to an unusual degree the materials and services of the library in fields related to society's present problems. The library must anticipate and stimulate, as well as meet, these needs.

The essential internationalism of intellectual materials should lead every librarian and library trustee to assist in maintaining respect for the cultural achievements of all

peoples, and to advocate continuing and expanding our cultural relations with all nations in spite of difficulties. The opportunities for cooperation with our nearest neighbors must no longer be neglected.

A vigorous emphasis on issues which are of current importance to citizens should facilitate the achievement of the library's long-time objectives. Reading and study may be vitalized by being related to events and ideas which are stirring men's minds at the moment. The diffusion of knowledge and understanding was never more important to the welfare of mankind.

When, as now, it becomes necessary to mobilize all educational and cultural resources for defense and for the preservation and improvement of the American way of life, it must be deplored that millions of Americans do not have library service. Until such service is everywhere available, a first objective of the American Library Association must be the extension and betterment of libraries, with local, state or provincial, and national support.

The social and intellectual unrest growing out of the present world situation may lead to confusion and despair; or it may lead to a renaissance of critical inquiry and constructive thinking. Whether the result will be the one or the other will depend in no small measure on the ability of libraries and other agencies of enlightenment to adapt their services to present needs.

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION • 1941