

NEWS NOTES ON INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

March 1952

Dr. Luther H. Evans, Librarian of Congress, on February 4, 1952 declared in a speech in Peoria, Illinois, "Libraries should permit freedom of expression in every medium available to the public," and that "...citizens must not be deprived of the right at any time or for any reason to go to their public library and read what the other side says about itself and about us."

Dr. Evans spoke at the invitation of the local Advertising and Selling Club and the League of Women Voters.

He also commented on a long raging dispute in Peoria occasioned by the purchase by the Peoria Library of the U. N. film, "Of Human Rights." Regarding this dispute, he stated, "You are undermining the freedom of the people if you compel your library not to show a film like the United Nations film."

He also stated his opposition to attempts by some groups and individuals to label library materials.

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Commenting on Dr. Evans' speech (see above), Gomer Bath, feature columnist of the Peoria Star on February 6, 1952, in his column, "Straws In the Wind" wrote, in part, as follows:

"When I heard that Dr. Luther Evans, librarian of Congress, was coming to Peoria to speak, and that he was coming at a crucial time in the local library controversy, I doubted that his appearance here was a coincidence."

..."Dr. Evans statement that he came here to 'review' our controversy opens several avenues of the most intriguing speculation. Members of the library Board, in particular, should be interested in probing the meaning of that ambiguous statement."

..."The library Board did not request him to 'review' the local situation. Did an individual or a minority group of the Board request it, without the knowledge of the full Board?"

..."Did Dr. Evans respond to a request from an individual or group associated with the library, to come all the way to Peoria to review the controversy?"

"How did Dr. Evans review the situation after he arrived here? There was no meeting of the library Board while he was here. ...Peoria Post No. 2 of the American Legion is playing a prominent role in what Dr. Evans called 'the local situation', but he did not call on any officer of the Americanism committee."

... "Dr. Evans holds a high position in Washington. Did he review the Peoria situation as an official of the federal government or as an individual? Was his visit here comparable with a visit of the state superintendent of public instruction? It is my understanding that the city library board was an autonomous unit, subject to no review except by the municipal government with respect to its budget."

"Assuming that Dr. Evans will write a report of his Peoria review, I would like to have a copy of it, and I think the library board and Peoria Post No. 2, American Legion, would too. I would guess that some members of Congress also might like to receive copies."

... "Readers-between-the-lines will sense my doubt that Dr. Evans came all the way to Peoria for this review without some special urging from here, that he arrived openminded and without fixed conclusions about 'the local situation', and that his appearance here was not planned to help turn the tide in favor of one side of the library film controversy."

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Again in Peoria, the library board, it was reported on February 16, approved a plan embodying the latest wrinkle in labeling whereby any controversial films would be previewed by interested local organizations, whose opinions will then be pasted on the reel cans.

The resolution, adopted by a vote of 5-3, reads as follows:

"That the library board instruct the librarian to arrange a schedule of periodical previews of newly purchased films dealing with the national, international, political, economic, social and religious subjects and that he invite civic organizations and any others interested to send representatives to each showing with power to express in writing the attitudes of their organizations toward each film viewed, said previews to be held prior to the issuance of new films and said comments to be typed and identified as to the organization and permanently attached to the film so that users may have ready access to the reactions of any groups wishing to take advantage of this privilege and that the following films, 'Of Human Rights', 'Brotherhood of Man', 'Boundary Lines', and 'Peoples of the USSR' be so shown at the first preview scheduled."

Xenophon Smith, Librarian of the Peoria Public Library protested on the grounds that such a motion "...will cause this board considerable trouble...it will, perhaps, move from films to books. It's going to be cumbersome and difficult...By whatever you call it, it is labeling."

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The U. S. Supreme Court in a decision announced on March 3, upheld by a vote of 6-3 the constitutionality of the N. Y. State Feinberg Law which bars communists from teaching in the state's public schools.

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The N. Y. State Board of Regents announced on February 6 the appointment of a new commission empowered to examine textbooks for any seditious material which tends to promote disloyalty to the United States or which tends to favor the cause of any country with which the U. S. might be at war.

The Commission may issue a certificate of disapproval for any book it finds to be subversive and to notify all school authorities in the state. Use of any disapproved text will subject a teacher or school officials to misdemeanor charges.

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In a letter dated January 11, 1952 to the ALA Committee on Intellectual Freedom, Robert North, Jr., President of the West Virginia Library Association, reported that the Library Bill of Rights was unanimously adopted by the Association on October 20, 1951.

The Association is also considering adoption of the ALA policy on labeling.

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The ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee has been apprised of the fact that Branners Bibliofile Antikvariat, an old and well-known Danish firm of book dealers has been denied the use of the U. S. mails on the ground that it deals in "obscene and indecent books."

The firm has been notified to this effect by the Office of Solicitors, U. S. Post Office Department in Washington, although, to its knowledge, no investigation was made.

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During a discussion of the proposed 1952 budget for the Peoria Public Library (Peoria, Illinois), the Library Board entertained a motion to label "questionable or controversial" library materials. Xenophon Smith, Librarian, opposed this, and offered instead to acquaint the Board with the ALA policy on labeling. He offered to read it, but the Board said they didn't want to hear it.

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Early in December, the Pennsylvania State Legislature supplied Pennsylvanians with a new "loyalty" law outlawing Communists, the law being modeled after other existing state measures.

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The ban against Consumer Reports, monthly publication of Consumers Union, in the Dayton (Ohio) high schools was lifted early in the school year after careful consideration by the Dayton Superintendent of Schools. The periodical is still barred from the Cincinnati public school system, however.

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Helen Haines' "Living with Books" (1950 ed.) is the subject of an article in The Freeman, January 14, 1952, by Oliver Carlson. In it the author quotes Miss Haines extensively, out of context, in an effort to illustrate, "her late espousal of communism, and her attempt to boost its literature."

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David K. Berninghausen, Librarian of Cooper Union Library, and former secretary of the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee spoke on "The Freedom of Inquiry" on March 2. His lecture was one of a series of the Cooper Union Forum on Education, currently being given in the Great Hall of the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York. The entire series is being broadcast nation-wide via the National Association of Educational Broadcasters network.

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According to a recent communication from John F. Harvey, Chairman of the Iowa Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee, a proposed loyalty oath act was narrowly defeated in the Iowa state legislature, partially as a result of the committee's forthright action.

The committee, consisting of Harvey, Clyde Walton of the Univ. of Iowa Library, and Thelma Grover of the Cedar Rapids Public Library, has outlined for itself, what is undoubtedly a very active program for the current year. The entire program consists of 29 points and is so extensive that it may well serve as a model for similar state and local committees.

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Recent books of interest:

- Barth, Alan. The Loyalty of Free Men
- Biddle, Francis. Fear of Freedom
- Commager, Henry S. and others. Civil Liberties Under Attack
- MacLeish, Archibald. Freedom is the Right to Choose

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