Edward G. Holley | Dean, University of North Carolina School of Library Science

Who Runs the Library?

Last year in my presidential address to the Texas Library Association,[1] I took as my text two suggestions from John Hersey's Letter to the Alumni. Some of you may recall that Hersey advised the Yale alumni that society needed two things in its search for a viable future: (1) a restoration of a sense of trust, and (2) decentralization of power. In my introductory remarks, before we get to the real discussion section of our program, I want to go back to that text to provide a backdrop for our subsequent conversations on "Who Really Runs Libraries?"

Few would doubt that there has been a steady erosion of trust in all areas of life during the sixties: in government, in the courts, in the schools, in higher education, and in librarianship. This rising distrust applies especially to those who exercise leadership roles in libraries, whether they are trustees, or mayors, or college presidents, or head librarians, or library department heads. Suspicion, discord, and distrust have been an increasingly difficult element with which anyone has to deal if he assumes responsibility for a supervisory role, whatever his position may be, and this applies to supervisory clerical personnel as well as professionals. The supervisor had better be prepared to deal with it in terms of whatever options are available to him, even though those options may sometimes appear somewhat limited and may seem to offer little in the way of long-term solutions.

One of the most serious criticisms of libraries is that most employees, whether professional or clerical, are not involved in or do not participate directly in decisions that affect their life styles, their day-to-day performance, and their "life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness," to use Mr. Jefferson's famous phrase. On the other side the citizen finds government and libraries unresponsive, public service virtually nonexistent, and to quote one of my interviewees of last spring, that "nobody really gives a damn."

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that many a supervisor who may have occupied a position of power and influence over a long period of time, e.g. a director of libraries, who may have held a leadership role for fifteen to twenty years, finds it increasingly difficult to continue to fulfill such roles. Many are retiring early, some with bitterness, but most with relief, others are actually being moved aside, some are moving up into library school teaching (with what may turn out to be surprising results if they haven't been in the class room for a while), and I know of at least one public library director who chucked it all for the presumed less demanding task of running a branch library.

What I'm saying is that any individual who has been in a given position for a fairly long period of time is likely to be in trouble. This applies no less to other supervisory positions in libraries than it does to directors. Directors are merely the most visible and most convenient symbol on which to focus one's unhappiness. Boards of trustees, whether of public libraries, or schools, or colleges, have often been astounded at the open contempt in which they are held, not just by the general public but by the people who must ultimately implement the policy decisions they have decided upon for the operation of libraries, even though many of those same critics may have had substantial input to the working papers which provided the framework for those decisions. Down the pyramidal ladder, meanwhile, department heads frequently have trouble integrating new staff into their departments, especially if there is a significant age differential, or if the department is understaffed, or if the physical space is cramped and unsatisfactory.

Indicative of the depth of feeling about personnel problems in libraries was the comment of one elderly reference librarian I met on my CLR Fellowship trip last spring. Reference Librarian X was head of a large departmental library in a new separate library building at a major Midwestern university. I'm afraid my first impression was that he was the typical fuddy duddy librarian, so I expected to spend little time with him and certainly didn't expect to learn much. Morever, it was five o'clock at the end of a long, tiring day of interviewing. "What," he asked, "are you really looking for?" In my most urbane and professionally polished manner I suggested to him that I was trying to find out how urban university libraries were organized,

whether or not they were developing different patterns of management, and whether or not I could apply any emerging patterns to the University of Houston. In unexpectedly harsh tones that really made me sit up and take notice Mr. X replied, "Nothing is going to change the way libraries are managed until head librarians cease having contempt for their staffs. You can have any kind of organization you want, you can draw nice charts, but until head librarians respect their staffs, it won't make any difference." As he proceeded to warm up to his subject, I learned that faculty disrespect merely reflected disrespect from the director, that there was no staff participation in the management of that library, that the director never listened to the staff, that departmental meetings were a farce, and that the director always controlled staff meetings by presiding, preparing the agenda, and writing the minutes. This was pretty heady stuff for five o'clock in the afternoon. Mr. X did grudgingly admit there were occasionally some reference librarians who were incompetent, but he thought they paled into insignificance when one compared them with directors of libraries. As far as he was concerned, "lines on paper don't mean a thing."

Although I tried to argue with Mr. X and suggested that he was much too harsh on directors (after all, I was one), I remembered that there were a number of my director-colleagues who fit his description fairly well. Some of them had suggested to me that they thought none of the staff, except them, of course, deserved faculty status, and they rarely encouraged professional staff development in any real sense. Certainly one thing that my trip brought forcefully to my attention was that interpersonal relations between chief librarians and staff have suffered much in this past decade of tremendous expansion. As my friend Ann Hall of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh remarked, "One of our biggest hurdles is the remoteness and depersonalization of administration from other staff. These are some of the attendant disadvantages of growth." Certainly contempt from the director has been repaid in kind by the staff and whatever may be the reasons for "the summer of our discontent" there is little doubt that this resentment for directors has affected seriously and will continue to affect seriously the operations of all libraries, big and little, school, public, college and university. Usually the cry goes up "Lack of communication," and while that is a serious problem, it by no means is the only problem nor does it get to the root of the problem.

In this particular midwestern university it seemed to me that the library staff was longing for some really dynamic leadership with strong staff participation in the academic enterprise. At the same time, hard core dissidents on the staff are also realists; most of them don't expect a charismatic leader to arise and save them. Rather, they are looking quite hard at unionization to save them. However, in this situation, I wonder if unionization will not further polarize the staff with consequences which may last a long, long time? While unionization may be good for the staff in terms of salaries and fringe benefits, the effects of the battle on service to the public may well be disastrous. That would, I suggest, lead to further disenchantment with the library on the part of the students and faculty and mean even less sympathy for the library's rapidly mounting financial problems. Can one really say, under the circumstances, that unionization would ultimately benefit that particular library?

Later, at another distinguished university, the director confessed to me that in the pressures of raising money for a new building, planning its construction, working on its equipment, and finally moving into the building, the top library administrators had lost contact with the rest of the staff with more serious consequences than they had ever envisioned. In this particular library situation the library administration had taken a calculated risk. They realized that staff morale would likely deteriorate in the two or three year period when their energies of necessity had to be directed into other channels. What they had underestimated, and underestimated very seriously, was the extent of the strain this would place upon the rest of the staff. As a result there had been staff caucuses, an attempt at unionization, and a scurrilous newsletter with language that made future communication difficult if not impossible. Somehow it is not easy to sit down across the table from colleagues and discuss controversial personnel matters in amicable fashion with people who have just called your veracity in question, and have further undermined your leadership by broadcasting this to the total campus community. Perhaps this is like the old joke about hitting the mule in the head with a two by four to get his attention, but rather than moving the mule sometimes it may only make him more stubborn.

I cite these two large universities as indicative of the breakdown in trust that is occurring in many libraries, with its concomitant effect on total staff performance. In both cases there are, or soon will be, new directors, so no one can predict how either situation will ultimately be resolved,

or if it will be resolved. I would merely venture the opinion that new directors in such situations had either better be prepared to spend enormous quantities of time listening to and working with the staff (with probably serious consequences for their relationship with faculty and administration) or they had better set up machinery for good arbitration and bargaining procedures.

This leads me to my second point: decentralization of power. I suspect as librarians we have pushed too hard on the virtues of centralization for economy and efficiency these past two decades. If we had worked harder on decentralized service, we might well have more public support in this time of financial crisis for libraries. But libraries have long been organized along hierarchical lines and that pattern served fairly well when staffs were smaller and most of them saw each other, including the director, every day. It has served less well in recent years as staffs have grown larger and in some libraries has been the cause of endless friction. Part of the difficulty has been the lack of perception on the part of the chief administrators that their leadership role was changing. If one were to write a job description of the director of the Houston Public Library, the Houston Independent School District Library Supervisor, or the Librarian of Rice University today, and then compare it with an equivalent description which might have been written ten years ago, you would be greatly surprised at the differences. For one thing, directors used to stay home more. Travel funds were smaller, there were fewer professional associations, librarians were less involved in the political process, massive grants from the federal government, at least for libraries, were non-existent, and

librarians were not expected to be money raisers. If the mayor, or the superintendent, or the president said "no" to a library request that ended the matter. He controlled all of the money likely to be available for any of his units and determined, with advice of his lieutenants to be sure, how much of the total pie went to library purposes. That simple and uncomplicated relationship now appears quaint to most library directors. A really aggressive director will have been consorting (I use the word advisedly) with federal, state, or foundation officials to see if he can work up additional support for one of his projects, often before he even sees the president. Thus his role as an external agent for the library has changed drastically. If it hasn't, then you probably ought to be worried about how well your director perceives his task.

Let me cite a concrete example of administrative behavior that affects all staff members from the janitor to the director: the matter of salaries. All of us recognize that librarians' salaries are less than we would like. The second Cameron study from the Council on Library Resources just hit my desk last Wednesday.[2] Its conclusions demonstrate that some academic librarians continue to be greatly disturbed (as well they might) by the disparity between their salaries and those of professors. On the other hand most of us recognize that our salaries have increased substantially during the past decade. That, dear friends, did not happen accidentally. Even in an affluent society somebody has to convince the powers that be, whether school officials, state officials, donors, or presidents that money spent for excellent staff may well be the best money they ever spend. To secure money for increased salaries, or books, or buildings, or whatever,

legislatures have to appropriate enough dollars or foundations and private donors have to give enough dollars so that all of this becomes possible. Chief administrators, for the most part, are well aware of this. That's why they spend so much time in Austin and Washington. What they have failed to do, and often failed miserably at doing, is to explain to the staff, most of whom are woefully ignorant of the budgeting process, how library objectives and purposes are ultimately funded. Unfortunately, in most cases the only time many staff members learn about the budgeting process, even at the departmental level, is when they sit down with the chief administrators once a year to decide whether or not Suzie Jones gets a $200 or $300 raise this year.

Some people believe that the new process of program/performance budgeting or other new management techniques will change all of this. The summary of the Booz, Allen & Hamilton case study of the Columbia University Libraries,[3] which has just been released, makes much of the restructuring of the Columbia library system and management-by-objectives technique. Whether this approach will actually result in a greatly changed structure is not yet clear. Permit a skeptic to opine that a good deal of it sounds all too familiar but the language seems a little different.

Another case in point is the UCLA Library Administrative Network, which also involves the application of the newer behavorial science methods to library management. Both UCLA and Columbia make much ado about use of staff committees, Columbia having some 80 professional staff members out of 150 currently serving on committees and UCLA having an involved

committee structure of advisory committee, random groups, and staff resource committees[4] the like of which you wouldn't believe. Sometimes it sounds like the Biblical story of Ezekiel's wheels within wheels, or in other words, bizarre. Both systems, however, do come down strongly on the source of ultimate authority: the chief librarian, who continues to make the final decisions. I suspect that element is much in line with the traditional American approach of strong managers and may make more sense than another development, library governance, to which I shall shortly return.

Incidentally, if you want to pursue either of these matters in more detail, I refer you to my lecture, "American University Libraries: Organization and Management," which Texas A&M University Library published recently as its Miscellaneous Publication No. 3 and will sell you for $1.00, and my expanded version of this "Organization and Administration of Urban University Libraries," which will appear in the May, 1972, issue of *COLLEGE AND RESEARCH LIBRARIES*. If this tutorial and those two publications don't frighten you off altogether, there will be a panel on trends in university library management at ALA this summer in Chicago.

Whether management-oriented or faculty-oriented, university libraries are groping toward a method of decentralizing the power structure. It may very well be true, as one of my correspondents wrote, that participatory democracy in management, or "off with the heads of heads," is one of the shortest lived phenomena we are likely to encounter. Though I suspect he's wrong, one thing librarians should clearly keep in mind: most librarians, like most citizens generally, like

strong leadership. For instance, see E. J. Josey's study of academic status in the March 15 issue of *LIBRARY JOURNAL*[5] where two-thirds of the reference librarians in New York academic libraries took a dim view of rotating chief librarians, though they had, by a little more than fifty per cent, supported the concept of library governance. As my correspondent noted concerning presidents, in three campuses where the faculties were marching against authorization leadership a few years ago, those same faculties can now be heard muttering that the new president isn't leading them.

My gratuitous remarks aside, let me proceed to a further example of decentralization of power by discussing briefly the movement for faculty status, particularly as it applies to library governance. Faculty status for academic librarians is largely a Post War II development. The first major university to have equivalent salaries and ranks for librarians was the University of Illinois, and all of us who ever served in that great library system are dedicated to its faculty rank concept for librarians. Under the leadership of Robert B. Downs,[6] for whom faculty rank for librarians was an article of faith, many other institutions in the intervening twenty-five years have followed the Illinois lead. Some institutions didn't go all the way with this, and stopped short of faculty titles and salaries, with a sort of halfway house called "academic status." On the other hand, even where librarians became assistant professors, associate professors, and full professors, they did not proceed to organize themselves as a faculty body with committees on promotion, tenure, grievances, etc., and certainly not with the election of chairmen, as often happens in other academic departments. Professional staffs

even played relatively minor roles in selecting new directors, that function being considered too important to be left to mere librarians, however faculty oriented they might be.

By the sixties, however, a few libraries began moving in the direction of library governance. Two of the most notable are the libraries of the City University of New York, whose faculty status is clearly spelled out in their forty-page union contract, and the University of Miami at Coral Gables-The latter, to my way of thinking, has one of the most outstanding examples of library governance I have encountered. Within the faculty government charter librarians are given responsibility for their own organization and for participation in the appointment, and retention of professional staff members and administrative officers. Certainly libraries planning to organize as a faculty should have a close look at the relevant portions of the Miami Faculty Manual.[7]

As a result of the ACRL Membership Meeting in Dallas last year, any academic library which takes seriously the new ACRL Standards will have to come to terms with library governance, since paragraph two reads:

College and university libraries should adopt an academic form of governance. The librarians should form as a library faculty whose role and authority is similar to that of the faculties of a college, or the faculty of a school or department.[8]

Perhaps it is unnecessary to remark that the role of the chief librarian will undoubtedly undergo a decided change if the faculty governance model is followed. The chief librarian may become a dean, and thus primarily an administrative official, or he may become a department head, possibly elected by or at least

confirmed by the staff. The normal academic procedures would then come into play: regular meetings of the total faculty, selection of faculty committees, more formal standards for professional development, as well as the endless arguing, professional jealousies, and cumbersome decision-making that follow in its train. The California State College system wants to move into a situation where at least the library department heads are elected by the library staff, while some City University of New York librarians want to go further and elect the chief librarian.

If one believes that faculty governance, under serious attack in some quarters, is the adequate model for libraries, that still leaves the clerical staff. What do you do about them? If one assumes as a general principle that individuals in a democracy have a right to participate in decisions that directly affect them, can he ignore the clerical staff who constitute anywhere from fifty to seventy per cent of most library staffs? "They have their union to protect them," intoned one library director, but that position assumes that clerical personnel in libraries are interested only in benefits and working conditions while professional librarians are the only ones interested in policy matters. Are librarians really interested in policy matters or are they chiefly interested in their own benefits and working conditions? I strongly suspect the latter, but I do so with disappointment, for I think the truly dedicated professional ought to be interested in policies of the library in which he serves. Moreover, one has to ask himself seriously if the advent of library governance really does improve the problem of communications. The evidence on this point is by no means clear, but there is fairly good reason for skepticism. Despite its enormous and time-consuming effort

the Library Administrative Network at UCLA, which did indeed improve communications, is still regarded by many of the staff as being peripheral to their major concerns.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, what does the client think of all this? Is he really likely to be better served if we provide a different system of library governance and better status for librarians? To that question I would like to venture a tentative "yes," for I cannot conceive that a good librarian is either undeserving of faculty perquisites or unable to measure up fully to their standards. Yet I must admit that the evidence is not all that clear. In some cases service has definitely not benefitted from new forms of organization and governance. Indeed, it has deteriorated. In other cases it has not necessarily improved but at the very least it has resulted in improved morale for a dedicated group of professionals who have served their universities well over a long period of time.

The question to which we really need to address ourselves, and which I hope these tutorials of mine will open up, is how do we want to participate in library management? Do we want to have participatory democracy or representative democracy? Do we want strong or weak leaders? Do we want unions, faculty organization, or some as yet undetermined organization? If we restructure, how shall we see that the normal work load is distributed evenly? Can all this be done with benefit to ourselves and without harm to our patrons? And, finally, what influences, both internal and external, keep us from personal development and professional service at a high degree of excellence? These are all questions that I hope we'll think about and discuss together, for they will assume increasing importance in the next few years.

References

1 Edward G. Holley, "Whither the Texas Library Association?," Texas Library Journal, 47 (Summer, 1971), 49-51, 85-87.

2 Donald F- Cameron and Peggy Heim, How Well are They Paid? Compensation Structures of Professional Librarians in College and University Libraries, 1970-71; The Second Survey (Washington, D. C.: Council on Library Resources, 1972).

3 Booz, Allen and Hamilton, Inc., Organization and Staffing of the Libraries of Columbia University: A Summary of the Case Study (Washington, D. C.: Association of Research Libraries, 1972).

4 The best description of the UCLA program now available is Joanna E- Tallman, "The New Library Management Network at the University of California, Los Angeles."

5 E. J. Josey, "Full Faculty Status This Century," Library Journal, 97 (March 15, 1972), 984-989.

6 Downs has written often on this topic. His first article, "Academic Status for University Librarians: A New Approach," appeared in College and Research Libraries, 7 (Jan., 1946), 6-9. He edited an ACRL Monograph The Status of American College and University Librarians in 1958 and his article, "Status of Academic Librarians in Retrospect," in Lewis Branscomb, ed. The Case for Faculty Status for Academic Librarians (ACRL Monograph No. 33) (Chicago: American Library Association, 1970), pp. 111-118, is a good summary.

7 "Faculty Government," Facility Manual 1971-1972 (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami, 1971), 33-38, 45-46, 50-56.

8 "Standards for Faculty Status for College and University Librarians," College and Research Library News, (June 1971), 171.