

Democratization and the ALA Council

Members of the American Library Association will soon receive a ballot to vote on a proposed change in the bylaws of the association

Editorial

that would reduce the size of Council and in the process eliminate representatives on the Council from the divisions. This is one of the steps of "Democratization" recommended in the ACONDA report. This proposal was approved by the Council in Dallas.

I urge all members of ACRL to veto this change. A reduction of the size of a governing body such as the ALA Council has been recommended by advocates of change as a way of producing a less ponderous legislative group that will be speedier in taking action. The elimination of any Councilor who might bring the view of the "vested interest" of a division to Council, and the mandate to vote accordingly, is cited as a democratic move, in that the remaining Councilors will have only the total membership's interest at heart.

As a matter of fact, the process of nomination and election of a smaller ruling Council is more amenable to influence, if not control, by vested interests and hence tends to a state of decreased democratization than now pertains. As long as the Association is composed of divisions, with many views and interests, official representation on the Council of this pluralistic society must be guaranteed—even if the representatives later vote as individuals and not as Councilors for the divisions.

The malaise that many people attribute to the ALA Council is due not to its size and composition. Rather, it must be principally attributed to an improper construction of the hierarchy through which decisions flow toward the point of Association action, the very brief time span of conferences at which deliberations are held, and an unfortunate scheduling during the conferences of the meetings of the groups and the official hierarchy in a sequence that is out of phase with the required flow of resolutions. The whole process of mobilizing the ALA to make commitments according to members' desires and appropriate to the goals of the Associations must be reviewed. Fortunately, the Association has ordered such a study.

In any event, forcing a speeding up of deliberations tends to reduce truly democratic action. Good decisions, democratically reached, will necessarily be reached slowly if the full power of democratic procedure is invoked.

ALA is essentially a personal membership organization. As long as the members have decid-

ed to form themselves into divisions within the larger framework—and all members belong to at least two divisions—there must be a guaranteed mechanism for the official mandates of these divisions for Association action to be brought to the higher deliberative forum. Division representation on Council is essential for democratic action as the Association is now structured. Guaranteed divisional representation cannot be eliminated until divisions are eliminated. It is quite possible that this will be an issue in the forthcoming study of the Association. I suggest that the goals of speedier Association action on issues important to members, in priority order as determined by members, will be gained only by a complete change of the structure of the decision-making process and the ordering of the hierarchy of groups through which decisions move. The elimination of division representation at this time, in my view, moves the point of final decision-making away from, and not toward, its proper location. It would create only another element of discontent with the Association's potential for action. Discontent leads to disaffection, and ultimately, to abandonment of the Association by many of its constituents.—*Russell Shank, President-Elect, Association of College and Research Libraries*

Members should also see the remarks of Miss Peggy Sullivan on this subject in the September issue of American Libraries. ■■

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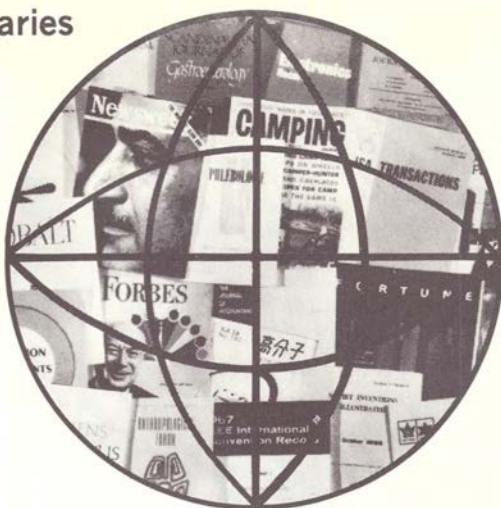
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