Railroad Tracks and Alphabet Soup

The editor of *CRL* has received more than seventy letters in response to his editorial in the March issue of *CRL* warning of the possibility of the discontinuance of divisional publications because of budget restriction. The letters are all strongly supportive of *CRL* and about 95 percent of them also support the continuation of the *News*. A significant number of the respondents warned that if the journal program is curtailed—not only *CRL* but other divisional journals as well—there would be no justification for continuing institutional memberships, to say nothing of personal memberships. This vehement response to the possible loss of identity of *CRL* as a divisional journal is a tribute to the quality of the publication and to the editorial work which goes into maintaining its level of excellence.

However, the issue of the manner of financing ACRL journals is only one aspect of the budget problem vis-à-vis ALA and divisional activities. This frustration, which has been a continuing and developing one, stems from the fact that while the ACRL membership constitutes one of the largest divisions and its members pay the highest average personal dues of any of the divisions, the budget granted to ACRL is not adequate to implement the programs and activities which ACRL sees as its own priorities. One acute example of this over the past two years has been the inability of the Academic Status Committee to move forward with any strength or speed because of its inability to obtain funds both for staffing and for investigations.

This confrontation on the matter of budget between the divisions and the overall structure of ALA, during the period that I have been President-elect and President of ACRL, is but one element in the continuing distress over the organization of the whole association, and has manifested itself in the disquieting conduct of recent Annual and Midwinter Meetings. As my consciousness level about ALA has risen, my sensitivity to the nuances concerning the politics, ego satisfactions, and personal concerns of divisions, committees, round tables, task forces, etc., etc., has intensified to the extent that I have developed two theories about the structure of ALA: one is Railroad Tracks, the other is Alphabet Soup.

The Railroad Tracks Theory: I sense that the parent ALA organization and the divisions operate on two parallel lines, hopefully

both going in the same direction, so that the train running on them is not derailed. I suppose one could say that railroad ties do link the tracks at certain points, but I wonder whether the engineer directing the train has consulted the passengers about their destination? As president of a division, I have discovered that there is no direct involvement of divisions at the ALA Executive Board level in the decision-making and policy-developing process.

The Alphabet Soup Theory: Here we are at the division and committee level with many compound letters—ACRL, IFC, LAD, SRRT—all floating around, not even in a clear bouillon but in a clouded broth, and they do not have the capability of chemical atoms to come together to form molecules. So there we all are, each going our own way, not seeing very clearly.

How do we resolve this situation? Reorganization, of course, is in the minds of all of us and, as ACRL's officers see it, there are three alternatives: Complete separation from ALA; or one of the two forms of organization proposed by ACONDA—type of libraries vs. type of activities. The question which ACRL members have to ask themselves and answer is: To what extent do they identify with an academic community and wish to retain this as the common bond amongst librarians who work in such institutions; or, are their first interests involved with the varying functions within libraries? The ACRL Board has gone on record as favoring federation by type of library. ACRL membership must now decide and make its wishes known.

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