



Information for Social Change

"an activist organisation that examines issues of censorship, freedom and ethics amongst library and information workers..."

ISC 22, Winter 2005/2006

The newspaper industry and the powerful effect of language; Cuba – libraries and computers; globalisation – health, libraries, information and education; social exclusion and colonialism; social class and public libraries; academic freedom; Social Action in Library and Information work worldwide; the UK Government's Education White Paper; Quebec and writing for the information sector

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Welcome to ISC 22. We have another packed issue, on a wide variety of themes on radical library and information subjects around the world. Topics include the newspaper industry; Cuba; globalisation; social exclusion and colonialism; social class and public libraries; academic freedom; social action in library and information work worldwide; the UK government's education White Paper, Quebec and writing for the information sector.

The next few issues will be themed issues, on a variety of topics, the first of which will be on the subject of *Education for Social Change* and will be guest edited by Glenn Rikowski, who is a leading alternative thinker and activist in the field of education. The following issue (winter 2006/07) will be based on the conference proceedings of the Library Workshop at the World Social Forum and will be guest edited by Mikael Bööök and Kingsley Oghojafor, who will both also be participating in the event. If you would like to suggest a theme and guest edit a future issue of ISC, then please let us know.

We begin this issue with an article entitled *Cuba and Computers* by **Dana Lubow** helps to dispel the myth that computers and the internet are banned in Cuba and that all information is controlled by the state. The biggest threat to intellectual freedom and the flow of information in Cuba is the illegal US blockade which has now been in place for over 40 years. As Dana points out:

Despite this reality, computers and access to the internet are part of Cuban life. They are prioritised for use in places where utilisation is on a collective and massive scale, such as in elementary and secondary schools, which have a ratio of 20 students per computer, universities, health and cultural centres and many other social institutions. Even children in preschools have computer access to educational software. There are 600 Computer and Electronic Youth Clubs in existence throughout the country.

Young people in Cuba also have access to an excellent state run public library service and this is the subject of the article on *Shaping Our Future: Library Services for Youth*. **Miguel Viciado** Valdes works at the Ruben Martinez Villena Public Library in Havana and his article looks at the library needs of young people in the city. Cuba actively involves and engages local communities in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of library services:

In Cuba the public libraries throughout the country, as well as other cultural institutions, have carried out this type of study in order to understand their user's preferences and to be able to design or redesign the services including the cultural programming they offer their communities and to establish work strategies that correspond to the preferences of their users and the role and mission of each library.

As part of a Socialist state that is working towards Communism, Cuban libraries have started to implement the Marxist principle of "From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs". Cuban libraries have the appropriate strategies,

structures and organisational culture which enable them to identify, prioritise and meet community needs. Getting the culture right – “the way we do things around here” – is essential. But, as **Annette de Faveri** points out in her article, librarians are often mired in a *Culture of Comfort*. In other words, the attitudes and behaviours of some librarians and library staff can be one of the most significant barriers to widening library use:

The library’s culture of comfort lets us define our communities as the people who use our services, and who know and like us. Our responsibility to the community is discharged when we meet the needs of these patrons. We then evaluate and measure our success by surveying individuals who use the library. By definition these are people who find the library supportive of the issues that matter to them and who see the library reflecting the values and social structures that they are comfortable with. This self reinforcing loop lets us mask exclusionary library practices by claiming that we respond to community feedback, and that we serve all the people who want to be served.

Annette compares this culture of comfort to a culture of colonialism. And like colonialism it assumes that the colonizers understand the needs of the colonised better than they do themselves. In this analogy, the colonisers are the white, confident, articulate middle class; and the colonised are the disempowered working class, the socially excluded, Black communities and other marginalised groups.

Annette’s article is from a Canadian perspective, as is the piece by **Brian Campbell** on “*IN*” versus “*WITH*” the Community: *Using a Community Development Approach to Public Library Service*. Brian looks at the differences between community outreach (working in the community) and community development (working with the community):

Outreach supports detachment, but community development requires risk. Community development looks into the library rather than the other way around. It changes community perceptions of librarians and libraries and deals with communities and individuals not as fragments or episodes but as a totality. It requires engagement and personal vulnerability rather than static or official plans. Outreach is an extension of our present business model. Community development is a rich and complex approach that evolves innovative models of librarianship and sustainable communities.

Annette and Brian are both involved in the Working Together: Library-Community Connections Project (March 2004-April 2008). The main objects of this project are to: create Community Development Librarian posts; develop techniques for working with the community; develop strategies to assist libraries in responding to systemic barriers to the socially excluded; develop a toolkit for Canadian libraries to use in creating community development strategies and working with the socially excluded. More information about the Working Together Project can be found in *Feliciter* (journal of the Canadian Library Association), Vol. 51, No. 6 (2005).

Social class is the biggest determinant of success and progress in capitalist societies and **John Pateman** continues his series on social class and public libraries in his article, *Mind the Gap*. This is the title of a book by Ferdinand Mount:

There is something peculiar about the British attitude to class, some contradiction or unease. On the one hand, we say that class is a thing of the past or rapidly becoming so...Anyone can now pass so freely from one part of society to another that the barriers, such as they are, are no longer to be taken seriously. On the other hand we continue to 'mind the gap'...

Class is just as important today as it was in 1848 when Karl Marx and Frederick Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto*. Those who say that class no longer exists or “we are all middle class now”, can afford to be dismissive of class because they themselves are middle class and hold all the power in society. There are lower rates of social mobility in the UK than in most parts of Europe. Social mobility has slowed down considerably and is actually now in decline. Someone like myself, who was born in the 1950s and went to university in the 1970s, was more socially mobile than my son who was born in the 1990's. Another thing that has gone is the respect which used to exist between the classes. If the middle class are not denying that the working class still exist, they are laughing at and despising them as ignorant, flashy “chavs”. As the “white flight” by the middle class from cities continues to accelerate we will have an increasingly polarised society between the haves and have nots. The answer lies in giving the working class back more power and control over their lives:

This could have a dramatic effect on public libraries and force or encourage them to take a needs based approach to service delivery. In a recent opinion poll more than two thirds of British adults considered themselves to be working class. Putting power and control back into their hands would give working class people a majority stake and say in how public libraries are managed and delivered.

Keith Nockells has written an interesting piece about the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and how this relates to health care – the GATS being about the liberalisation of trade in services. There is a need for an analysis of how the GATS is likely to impact on all the different public service sectors. Ruth Rikowski has done this for libraries, and has written many articles for ISC on the subject. We are now very pleased to have this contribution from Keith, considering the impact of the GATS on health. We would also welcome contributions from others, examining a variety of public service sectors, such as education, housing, social services etc. and the likely impact of the GATS on these different service sectors. Keith begins his article by briefly explaining what the GATS is and an outline of some of the complexities in the agreement. This includes listing the four ‘modes’ of trade in services – namely, cross border supply, consumption abroad, commercial presence and presence of natural persons. Then, he goes on to provide a very useful annotated bibliography of the GATS and health.

Ruth Rikowski's article in this issue is entitled *Traditional knowledge and TRIPS*. Traditional knowledge (TK) is usually associated with knowledge that has been gathered over a long period amongst local, indigenous communities in the developing world. Ruth considers how the World Trade Organisation's TRIPS agreement (the agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) is likely to impact on this traditional knowledge. She explains that much TK in the developing world is not even recorded, thus it cannot be copyright protected, or made available in a local library or resource centre. Meanwhile, this offers ripe opportunities for large

corporations to move in and appropriate this knowledge, often without giving due recompense to the local population. As Ruth says:

The TRIPS agreement does not refer to traditional knowledge specifically, but clearly the TRIPS is going to impact on TK. As it stands, large corporations in the west can easily appropriate traditional knowledge in the developing world, transform it into an intellectual property right, (in particular, it is often patented), make money out of it, but not compensate the original creators of this traditional knowledge.

Thus, large companies patent this knowledge and transform it into an intellectual property right and these patents are then traded in the market-place. TRIPS with its emphasis on the **trading** of intellectual property rights, will greatly assist with this whole process, Ruth emphasises. In essence, TRIPS is about transforming intellectual property rights into international tradable commodities. These commodities are sold in the market-place, and thus capitalism is sustained and perpetuated, whilst labour is exploited, and within this overall scenario those in the developing world will suffer in particular.

There then follows an article by **Alpesh Maisuria**, entitled *Sexy Words, Iconic Phrases and slippery terms – it's all newspaper talk: a theoretical analysis of the language used by the newspaper industry to manifest and perpetuate discourse*. Alpesh explores the range of positions adopted by newspapers to a variety of issues and then considers who profits from the underlying message that is being presented.

He argues that we need to adopt critical thought to the media, and seek to demonstrate that newspapers are ideological institutions which are designed to serve specific ideological objectives. He says that:

The media is an enterprise of inequality, because media corporations have the capacity to suppress contestation and alternative views by exploiting their power to galvanise specific discourses. (p.1 [57])

He also critiques the liberation theory, which newspapers can sometimes cleverly seem to be subscribing to, saying that:

Acting as though they are subscribing to the liberation theory – providing a voice to the voiceless, newspapers can advance their ideological position, whilst appearing to be representing those who are dispossessed near the bottom of the power hierarchical structure in society. (p. 14 [71])

The paper aims to show that in order to effectively critique society and to challenge the gross inequalities that it engenders, there is a need to understand the mechanisms that perpetuate it, which includes an analysis of the newspaper industry itself.

Toni Samek has recently joined the ISC Editorial Board and we are delighted to have two contributions from her in this issue. Firstly, an article which provides some information about her forthcoming book (2006) with Chandos publishers, which is entitled *Librarianship and Human Rights: a 21st Century Guide*. Secondly, a report of a conference that she attended on Academic Freedom Post 9-11, in September

2005. Toni's first piece, **Tracking Social Action in Library and Information Work Worldwide**, outlines some of the main aspects that will be covered in her forthcoming book. She begins by considering the concept of 'intellectual freedom'. As she says:

We grapple continuously with intellectual freedom issues at countless fronts on local, national and international levels: commercialization of public space, copyright and access to information...self-censorship and information suppression, social exclusion...transborder data flow, implications of World Trade Organization's agreements such as GATS and TRIPS, freedom of inquiry... and a global infrastructure of mass registration and surveillance.

This is also obviously linked to concepts such as freedom of opinion and expression, access to information and freedom of speech. Toni's book is intended to be of practical help for library and information workers around the world, as they seek to grapple with these issues, and to look for alternatives. As she says in regard to her book, it:

... is grounded in practical, critical, and emancipatory terms: social action is a central theme.

Toni considers 50 discrete forms of action to assist with this. These include, for example, alternative action programs, alternative conference programs, blogs, books, boycotts, campaigns, disaster response, educative approaches, petitions, position statements, resolutions, speeches etc etc. She concludes by saying that:

...social action in the context of library and information work involves both so-called "mainstream" and progressive pushes. Historically, the profession's claim to library neutrality drew a line between library issues and so-called non-library issues. This line has been paralleled in a categorical division between library advocacy and library activism. Hopefully, 'Librarianship and Human Rights' will help to blur these artificial lines – and to expose them as both counter-intuitive and counter-productive to the very nature of our work.

Academic Freedom Post 9-11: An Issues Report is the title of Toni's piece about the conference on academic freedom which was organised by the Harry Crowe Foundation and the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) in September 2005. Many issues were discussed including the rights and responsibilities of scholars on areas such as the corporatization of the university, secrecy in research, commodification of education, and ideological controls. Various conditions for the production and transmission of new knowledge were also considered, such as full and frank debate, creativity and freedom of expression. The report ends with two statements – one from the Canadian Library Association on Intellectual Freedom and one from the Canadian Association of University Teachers, which is a policy statement on Academic Freedom. The Canadian Library Association statement states that:

All persons in Canada have the fundamental right...to have access to all expressions of knowledge, creativity and intellectual activity, and to express

their thoughts publicly...Librarians have a basic responsibility for the development and maintenance of intellectual freedom.

We also have an article by **Ruth Rikowski and Glenn Rikowski** about the UK Government's education White Paper, which was published on 25th October 2005. Glenn participated in a discussion on the White Paper on the same day, on *The World Tonight*, on BBC Radio 4. This article summarises some of the main points that were discussed on the programme, and provides further analysis on the White Paper. It emphasises that the White Paper paves the way for the 'business takeover of schools'. It also highlights how this is part of a much bigger global agenda, which is fundamentally about transforming services (which includes Library Services and Education Services) into international tradable commodities. This is coming into effect through the World Trade Organisation's General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS). However, as Ruth and Glenn make clear, to fully understand what is going on here, we need to return to Marx, and to appreciate the fact that any analysis of capitalism must begin with the commodity.

Paul Catherall, who became our webmaster in the summer of this year, and is now also on the Editorial Board, has a piece in this issue, entitled *Starting to write for the information sector: some experiences*. Paul outlines how he became involved in writing for the information sector, as well as giving some advice to others that are considering or starting out on the writing path. As he says:

For those interested in writing, I would recommend starting to write about topics where you have developed knowledge or expertise, rather than an area about which you are unfamiliar...

Furthermore, that it is often better to start off by writing a short piece, rather than just "plunging into a full-scale text". Paul's first book, entitled *Delivering E-Learning for Information Services in Higher Education* was published with Chandos publishing in 2004.

There are 3 pieces in this issue by **Julian Samuel**, which are all about Quebec nationalism and racialism. They are entitled *Quebec's heart of darkness*, *Room at the Top* and *Quebec's Minorities*.

Julian Samuel's first piece *Quebec's heart of darkness*, considers Franco-Ontarian Daniel Poliquin's essay on Quebec nationalism. Poliquin examines the concept of Quebec nationalism in some detail. Samuel notes that there is 'cultural apartheid' in Quebec and that:

In Quebec, there is wall-to-wall white, pre-rational modernity. This aggressive/defensive class of technical media intellectuals... will not publish any historical, political or cultural criticism.

He also emphasizes how right-wing and nationalistic the newspapers are. Samuel says that he disagrees with Poliquin to the extent that he does not think that that is any such thing as Quebec "nationalism" as such. Instead, he says that:

*The term 'nationalist' cannot be used to describe Quebecois separatists. In political nomenclature, parties such as the *Partie Québécois*, *Bloc Québécois* are not at all nationalists: they are, properly speaking, revolutionary Provincialists (read ethnic nationalists).*

Also, he does not think that Poliquin goes far enough in his critique of Quebec's ethnic nationalists. He concludes by saying that Poliquin:

...like those who came before him, talk incessantly of their own culture as something detached from a multiracial Canada which is expanding, not narrowing its definition of citizenship...A subsequent book might breach those unassailable parameters that have limited Poliquin's current work on Quebec's ethnic nationalists.

Thus, although Julian Samuel has some reservations about Poliquin's work on Quebec nationalism, he clearly thinks that his work is important and that it is something that should be built on.

The second article by Julian Samuel is called *Room at the top: cultural bodies in Quebec lack any minority representation*. Samuel asks why there are not any visible minorities in key positions at Quebec cultural institutions, and why is it so far behind the rest of Canada on this matter. He also ponders whether the nearly all-white local media block any public discussion on this issue. He says:

In Quebec, decision-making in most media outlets are white. Blacks appear on the covers of the alternative weeklies if they can rap or do house, but there is little substantive coverage of the issue of racism in Quebec cultural institutions.

He goes on to say that:

The inexorable exclusion of minorities from key positions within cultural institutions is due to the tribal desire to pass on the best jobs to incumbent white elites, friends and family members.

Yet, if there were more critical and talented minorities in these key positions:

Quebec could produce a challenging and refined internationalized culture.

Samuel concludes by saying that:

Quebec culture would be irreversibly altered if creative visible minorities were allowed to have a say in the direction of cultural production. By maintaining the status quo, only white Quebec will benefit, the exclusion of minorities will make for bitterness and stagnation.

Thus, Samuel makes a very important and powerful argument in this article – that there are not enough visible minorities in various cultural activities in Quebec and that instead it is too white-dominated. Therefore, that Quebec culture would benefit from

the inclusion of more minorities, providing a varying, challenging, and critical perspective.

The third piece by Julian Samuel is called *Quebec's minorities: trapped between two solitudes*, and Samuel considers the Paris Quebecois project and Yves Michaud. He says that:

The PQ will continue to make racial and linguistic distinctions between citizens...

Later he refers to the white dominance in Quebec and says that simply putting a few token minorities in the media does not solve the race issue.

Visible minority demands are a thorn in the side of Quebec's white anglo elites. By placing a few handsome, smiling minorities on TV they think they have confronted and resolved the race issue. Who are they kidding?

Thus, all these 3 pieces expose the racialism that exists in Quebec, and demonstrate how the whites dominate. Furthermore, that there are few ethnic minorities in different cultural activities, and where they do exist they are really only a token gesture.

There are also *film reviews* of 3 films in this issue – *Shooting Imperialism*, *Bowling for Columbine* and *The Tree that Remembers*.

In *Shooting Imperialism*, Cecilia Morgan reviews 3 documentaries by Julian Samuel. She begins by saying that much has been written in the recent past about colonialism, imperialism and postcolonialism but that:

Julian Samuel's work challenges us to consider the possibilities and limitations of the place of film as a medium to explore these issues.

She is a historian who has been used to dealing with text, so she was curious to see how film could deal with these topics.

The 3 films are largely about Islam and its relationship to the West, although other colonial relationships are also discussed, such as Central Africa, Hong Kong, the Caribbean and India. She notes that Samuel undertakes a lot of interviewing throughout his films. Morgan says that:

The documentaries also seek to explore not just the 'construction' of an imagined and fantasy-ridden 'Orient' but they also seek to reverse these mirror images of East and explore what the 'West' meant to it.

Samuel also considers culture and Morgan says that he:

...links aspects of culture – language, symbol, image, metaphor, and narrative – to the material aspects of imperial expansion and resistance... Yet cultural symbolism and imagery are important not only for their ability to illuminate power relations: they can also be used to explore cultural differences.

She says that much of what is discussed in the documentaries is not new in theoretical and conceptual forms, but the format in which they are presented is ‘...a particularly compelling and intriguing one’. Morgan concludes by saying:

...Samuel brings considerable skill, creativity, and political acuity to this area of historical research. These films not only remind us that their themes are by no means ‘over and done with’ but they also suggest new ways of imagining – despite the difficulties involved – a more truly ‘postcolonial’ future.

Thus, clearly, Cecilia Morgan thinks that Samuel’s films provide a valuable contribution and a different dimension in regard to our understanding and appreciation of colonialist issues. Films can capture and express certain ideas and feelings in a way that it is not possible to convey in other media forms.

There are also *film reviews* of two other films. The first is a film review of *Bowling for Columbine*, by Julian Samuel. Secondly, there are two film reviews of the film *The Tree that Remembers*. One is by Julian Samuel and the other is by Pat Dillon.

In regard to *Bowling for Columbine*, directed by Michael Moore, Julian Samuel begins by questioning whether an apartheid system is re-emerging in America, where there is one rule for whites and another for non-whites. *Bowling for Columbine* considers these issues, and so it is an important and progressive film, Samuel says. However, Samuel also has some criticisms of the film. He argues that:

‘Bowling for Columbine’ shows that Americans, even critical ones like Moore, are profoundly obsessed with their own national problems and only minimally expose their government’s dictator-loving foreign policy. Americans come first, even in Moore’s world.

Moore highlights the fact that American elites have killed people all over the world, but Samuel says that Moore does not provide a very balanced approach when giving examples in regard to this.

Samuel continues saying that:

...Americans have tons of guns; that America is violent... [but that] These are a limited series of conclusions after 125 minutes, don’t you think? But he is addressing the masses. He has to keep it simple.

At least, this is the justification that inactive intellectuals use to defend Moore’s lack of depth and courage as a documentary film-maker, Samuel suggests – the need to address the masses. Julian Samuel concludes with a rather amusing comment, saying:

Ask away, Mr Moore, you’re an American. The world’s your oyster.

Finally, there are 2 reviews of *The Tree that Remembers*, which was directed by Masoud Raouf – one by Julian Samuel and one by Pat Dillon. This film won the Silver Award for Best Canadian Documentary and Gold Award at Yorktown. Raouf interviewed Iranian exiles that were imprisoned and tortured and who now live in Canada.

The first review is by Julian Samuel and he says that the interviews in the film display the suffering of the Iranians and that this is supposed to touch us on a personal level, but that there is no real political or historical analysis. Samuel then goes on to say that:

By not exposing Canada's role in supporting Iranian dictatorships, sentimental films such as 'The Tree that Remembers' actually perpetuate the suffering of Iranian people, their suffering is presented as something out there in the far away blue yonder, as something not connected to Canada. Their suffering is very much connected to what Canada does in terms of trade relations and foreign policy. This film does a profound disservice to the people who were and who are currently being brutalized; it tries to be poetic rather than expose arms trade deals and bankrupt foreign policy.

In contrast, in Pat Dillon's review the interviews are referred to in the following way:

Blending their testimony with historical footage and original artwork, Raouf honours the memory of the dead and celebrates the resilience of the living.

Pat Dillon thinks that the film demonstrates oppression and survival clearly, but that through this it also offers some rays of hope.

In **conclusion**, film can be an effective and an alternative media source for highlighting and exposing the gross inequalities that exist in the world, and for helping us to understand and critique society and to view the situation through a different lens. This will strengthen our position to enable us to challenge the global capitalist and colonialist agenda, and to look towards an alternative.