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The Politics of Promoting Freedom of Information and Expression in International Librarianship: The IFLA/FAIFE Project. [Book Review].

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REVIEWS

The Politics of Promoting Freedom of Information and Expression in International Librarianship: The IFLA/FAIFE Project. By ALEX BYRNE. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007. Pp. xiv+226. \$55.00 (paper). ISBN 978-0-8108-6017-9.

I have never reviewed a book whose content was so different from what I expected from its title. I anticipated a fairly detailed history of the IFLA/FAIFE Project (FAIFE) that would mainly interest IFLA junkies around the world. (The full name is International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression.) What I discovered was the promised analysis of the creation and first five years (1997–2002) of FAIFE in three core chapters but also, much to my surprise, multiple additional chapters on related issues. These concise and well-written chapters cover their subjects well and add value to the book but sometimes stray rather far afield from the main topic.

Alex Byrne revised his doctoral thesis at the University of Sydney to create this book, which has the advantages of a thesis with excellent scholarship, a rigorous methodology, supervision by a faculty advisor, and a twenty-five-page bibliography (pp. 193–217). On the other hand, he avoids the turgid prose that is so often characteristic of theses to create a very readable volume that has a broad appeal rare for doctoral research.

Byrne states that his research "was undertaken from the privileged position of an insider since [he] was the first chair of the FAIFE committee and participated in the ad hoc committee that led to its establishment" (p. 191). He had the backing of IFLA officials and staff so that his "roles and this support gave [him] very wide access to both documents and individuals related to the project" (p. ix). "Confidentiality did not hamper a frank account because the events and issues were recorded in statements, at meetings, and on websites" (p. x).

In chapter 1, Byrne contends that implementing FAIFE was a radical decision for IFLA because it moved the organization beyond its focus on nonpolitical professional issues to a broader mission of supporting the fundamental human right to information that includes a strong intellectual freedom stance. He often refers to the American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom as a model of what FAIFE wishes to do on a global scale. He also contends that FAIFE arose at a very specific historical moment because the end of the cold war helped bring about this change. The Soviet communist block had a very different idea about the role of information in society that was not congruent with FAIFE's focus on free access.

Chapter 2 gives a brief history of "The Agency of Libraries." These few pages admirably summarize the role of libraries in society over the last hundred years. Byrne's discussion is at the same time theoretical and practical and deepened my understanding of libraries, even after almost forty years of reading and discussing this subject.

In chapter 3, on the history of IFLA, Byrne concludes that "over its first seven decades, IFLA succeeded as an international professional organization through its promotion of international collaboration and technical proficiency but had much more limited success in articulating the relationship between the library's role in

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society and the underlying human rights" (p. 53). He also acknowledges the dominance of the northern European and North American countries within IFLA, although librarians from other parts of the world have played a greater role in recent years.

Chapters 4–6 provide what I expected from this book—an account of the origins of FAIFE and its activities during its first five years. The "uncertain beginnings" included increasing support within IFLA for the right of access to information found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that culminated in the formation in 1995 of the ad hoc Committee on Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (CAIFE) that was charged with presenting a report at the 1997 IFLA conference. The IFLA council strongly supported this report that recommended creating FAIFE and accepted the offer by various Danish bodies to host the new organization and provide financial support. The IFLA executive board quickly established the new program and asked Byrne to be its first chair.

Programmatically, FAIFE received less operational support from its committee members than expected and would soon face reductions in funding from its sponsoring organizations. The two most important documents to come from FAIFE during its first five years were the IFLA Internet Manifesto (http://archive.ifla.org/ III/misc/im-e.htm) and the Glasgow Declaration (http://www.ifla.org.sg/faife/ policy/iflastat/gldeclar-e.html) in support of the fundamental right of human beings both to access and to express information without restriction. A concern for some was that its agenda for free access to information and its location in Denmark could be seen as another way to reinforce the dominance of the Western liberal democracies within IFLA.

For those outside IFLA circles, I expect that most know about FAIFE from its role in responding to specific incidents against intellectual freedom. Because of the sensitivity in dealing with these incidents, only the chair and the secretary-general were authorized to take action. Byrne lists a total of twenty-eight incidents from 1997 to 2002 (p. 91) but also admits that, with its scarce resources, "IFLA/FAIFE could not actively investigate and pursue more than a handful of incidents each year" (p. 90). The most well-known case is probably the issue of independent libraries in Cuba, but FAIFE has become involved in cases involving both the liberal democracies (United States, Great Britain, France, and Japan) as well more authoritarian regimes (Indonesia, Zimbabwe, and Afghanistan). Except for issues with Cuban-American relations, Byrne concludes that "the various statements and other actions over the years were supported by IFLA members or at least raised no objections from them" (p. 114), though I am not as certain as he is that silence means agreement.

After this history of FAIFE, Byrne returns to his discussion of related topics. I found chapter 7's take on intellectual freedom, "Defending the Right to Information," most interesting for its international outlook, including a history of repression in South Africa and the recognition that theories of information exist that exclude providing information harmful to societal goals. While unlimited access to information has great merit as a concept, the author recognizes the tension between this principle and legitimate needs to control information in such diverse areas as state secrets and personal health history.

Chapter 8 traces the development of international nongovernmental organizations. Successful examples include the Red Cross and Amnesty International. Both have a clear purpose and avoid being identified with any one nation or political viewpoint. They also must have a broad enough appeal to retain their membership. Offending or not meeting the needs of members can lead to decline or to a schism such as almost happened with IFLA on the eve of World War II over Nazi Germany REVIEWS

and in 2000 over holding the annual conference in Israel. Byrne contends that FAIFE has helped transform IFLA through a process of renewal "into one of these new, interventionist international nongovernmental organizations" as "the promoter of the right of access to information" (p. 155).

In chapter 9 Byrne provides a more pointed analysis of how professional organizations extend their boundaries by moving from strict attention to technical issues to a broader concept of their role in society. He gives the example of the British Medical Association's campaigns against drunk driving and smoking. For him, "the IFLA/FAIFE project likewise expanded the ambit of librarianship by suggesting that members of the profession have an obligation to be concerned about the ideological and geopolitical barriers to unrestricted access to information as well as the technical and methodological" (p. 167). He contends that doing so will strengthen librarianship's claim to be a profession because one characteristic of the traditional professions is a code of ethics.

In chapter 10 Byrne sums things up by saying that FAIFE is much more than a new unit within IFLA. It embodies a renewal in the organization by giving IFLA an idealistic focus on the right of access to information. Adopting intellectual freedom as a primary objective moves IFLA beyond the realm of the technical to "a high-level moral purpose for the profession" (p. 186). He does conclude with a bit of pessimism. As noted earlier, financial resources have declined as IFLA members' philosophical support has not translated into funding. He also concludes that "it is too early to determine the long-term effect of the IFLA/FAIFE initiative on the authority and reputation of IFLA" (p. 188). In fact, one of my strongest criticisms of this work is Byrne's decision not to provide even a short postscript on developments since 2002.

I wish that Byrne had found a way to indicate the scope of this book in the title. The cataloger recognized this fact by giving four additional general subject headings beyond "IFLA/FAIFE," but even these do not provide access to the additional materials on international nongovernmental organizations and professional associations. On the other hand, I am not sure that I would have been able to come up with a more adequate title. Perhaps reviews such as this one will help.

From my American perspective and from my fifteen years as an IFLA committee member, I would make this book required reading for all Americans who attend IFLA and especially those who serve on committees. Some arrive with the assumption that IFLA works very much like the American professional associations (ALA, SLA, MLA, etc.) and would do well to acquire a greater sensitivity toward other library traditions. The volume would make it clear to them that IFLA moves forward though consensus rather than by contested voting and that IFLA officers must respect and integrate minority positions into any final product or action.

On the issue of intellectual freedom, the core of the volume, FAIFE's use of the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom example will make IFLA's change in direction appear less radical to many American readers who are used to this model and most likely were socialized to accept this core value of intellectual freedom during their library education. As Byrne so often states, FAIFE was a major shift in direction for IFLA.

Finally, I had great difficulty in writing this review because I am not sure that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. As I said in my opening paragraph, the chapters on related topics are well done. I learned a great deal about libraries as social agents, the history of IFLA, international nongovernmental organizations, and the expanding boundaries of professional organizations; but, after much thought, I have concluded that it may be a fault rather than a virtue that the peripheral subjects interested me more than the main topic—the IFLA/FAIFE Project.

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Amassing Treasures for All Times: Sir George Grey, Colonial Bookman and Collector. By DONALD JACKSON KERR. New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press; Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2006. Pp. 351. \$49.95 (cloth). ISBN 1-58456-196-3.

Back in 1986, Maori rights protesters in Auckland knocked the head off the statue of Sir George Grey. Unveiling a new statue of this influential and long-serving colonial governor in 1998, then governor-general Sir Michael Hardie Boys acknowledged the controversy surrounding the man in New Zealand one hundred years after his death. Grey's policies of agricultural settlement, suppression of revolt by native peoples, and autocratic management left a legacy for good and ill that is a familiar one to citizens of other former British dominions today. Erecting a likeness of Grey now, Boys insisted, was not intended to glorify him but instead was part of "an on-going commitment to understand the history of this community in which he played such a prominent early part" (http://www.gov-gen.govt.nz/utilities/printspeech.asp?ID=125). It is just such a fine line as this that Donald Kerr's book so successfully negotiates.

As the curator of the Grey Collection of rare books and manuscripts in the Auckland City Library for fourteen years, Dr. Kerr could be forgiven had he merely written an encomiastic account of his institution's greatest benefactor. But he has done much more. In giving us the story of Grey's life as a collector and lover of books, he opens up to us the private world of a public man, maps his acquisitiveness onto the terrain of nineteenth-century book collecting, and provides insight into the mentality of imperialism. This meticulously researched biography reaches beyond the circle of librarians and bibliophiles to appeal to anyone interested in the history of the book as well as to historians trying to understand the impulses that drove the British Empire.

In the process, Kerr develops a new kind of hybrid that he calls a "bio-bibliography" (p. 15). His approach he says has four goals, foremost of which is to cast new light on Grey as a bookman and collector. There are half a dozen political biographies of Grey, but this one is meant to examine one of his ruling passions, which turns out to reflect in meaningful ways on his role in government. Second, Kerr aims to expand on the type and categories of books Grey collected and to give bibliographical descriptions of his many treasures. This Kerr accomplishes with a reasonably light hand, weaving titles, formats, and provenance into a narrative of Grey's book-collecting career. Third, he desires to explain how Grey was able to assemble such an impressive series of personal libraries despite being so remote from the centers of the book world. And by giving an account of Grey's dealings with booksellers, he accomplishes his fourth goal of drawing a portrait of the changing face of book collecting in the nineteenth century. Of broad interest to the book history community, then, is his analysis of changing markets and social forces that gave rise to a wave of "bibliomania" at this time.

George Grey (1812–98) was a military man, intrepid explorer, and agent of empire. Sir Keith Sinclair, writing in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (http://www .dnzb.govt.nz/dnzb/default.asp?Find_Quick.asp?PersonEssay=1T74), calls him "one of the most remarkable nineteenth century British colonial governors." He twice