

Project: the history and impact of progressive library organizations

Al Kagan besökte i maj 2010 Sverige och BiS som en del i sitt arbete med att skriva den progressiva biblioteksrörelsens historia från 1960-talet och framåt. bis ställde några nyfikna frågor:

What is the aim of your project?

I am documenting the recent history and impact of progressive library organizations in the US, UK, Sweden, Germany, Austria, and South Africa. Activists in these countries developed the most impressive alternative organizations from the 1960s to the present, except for the South African organization which was disbanded in 2000. Most of these organizations are independent, but some of them have status or formalized relationships with their national professional bodies.

What is your own background?

I am the African Studies Bibliographer at the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign in the US. I have worked with the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) of the American Library Association for 30 years, and served 10 years as its representative on the ALA Council (governing body). I am a long-time member of the Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG), and was a member of South Africa's Library and Information Workers Organization (LIWO). I also convened a Social Responsibilities Discussion Group within the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). I chaired the first meeting of "Progressive Librarians Around the World" in Washington, DC in 1998 and attended the second and last meeting of that nature in Vienna in 2000.

How are you doing the research?

I have interviewed key librarians from the several organizations, consulted and gathered considerable archival materials, and of course, I am reading published articles and books. Further, I have discovered that Google Translate is remarkably effective in translating

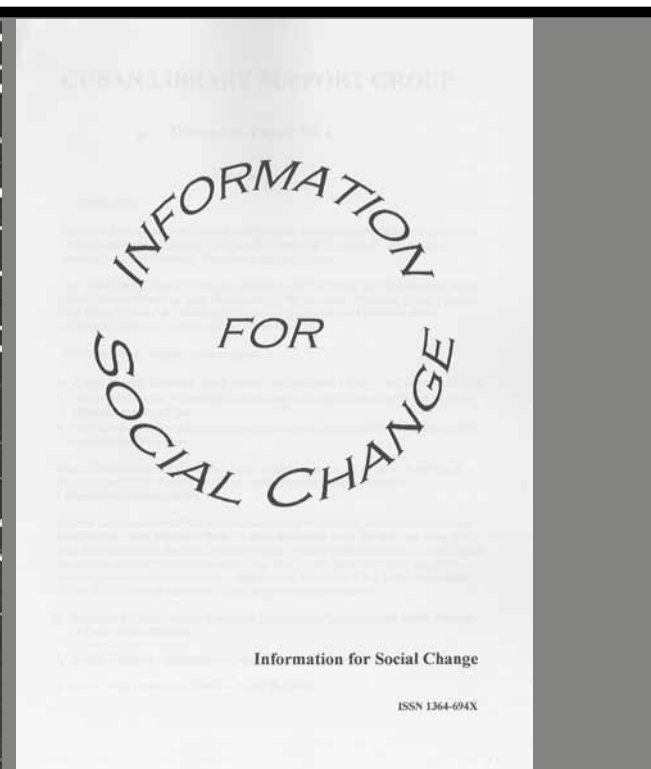
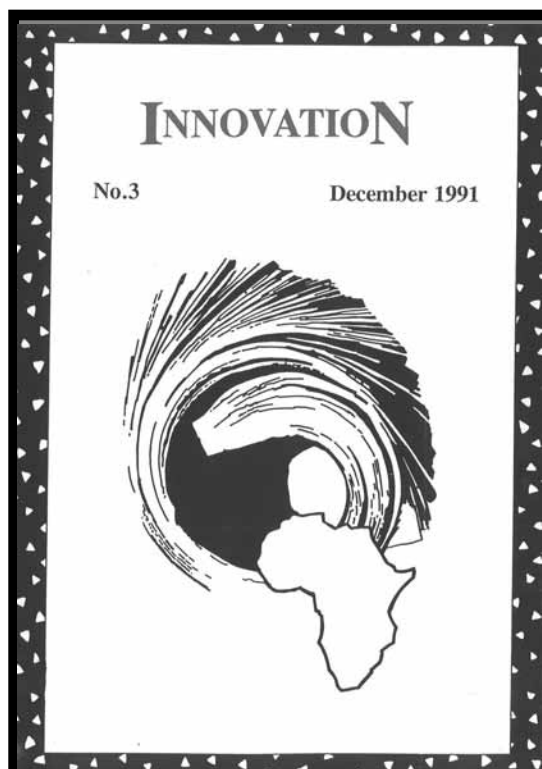
BiS articles into mostly intelligible English, at least enough to understand the main points. Of course, it helps a lot to have a general understanding of the issues before using automatic translation.

What have you accomplished so far, and when do you expect to publish it?

I have good written drafts of the chapters on LIWO and BiS, and I am currently working on the chapter for the UK's Information for Social Change (ISC). According to my book contract with McFarland, I am supposed to finish by the end of the summer, but it is going to take considerably longer than I originally expected. Perhaps I need another year to finish up. It depends very much on my university job, and how current reorganization of our library affects my workload.

Can you reflect on what you have experienced so far?

It has been extremely enjoyable to travel and interview people in the various countries. Of course, I have met many of these people

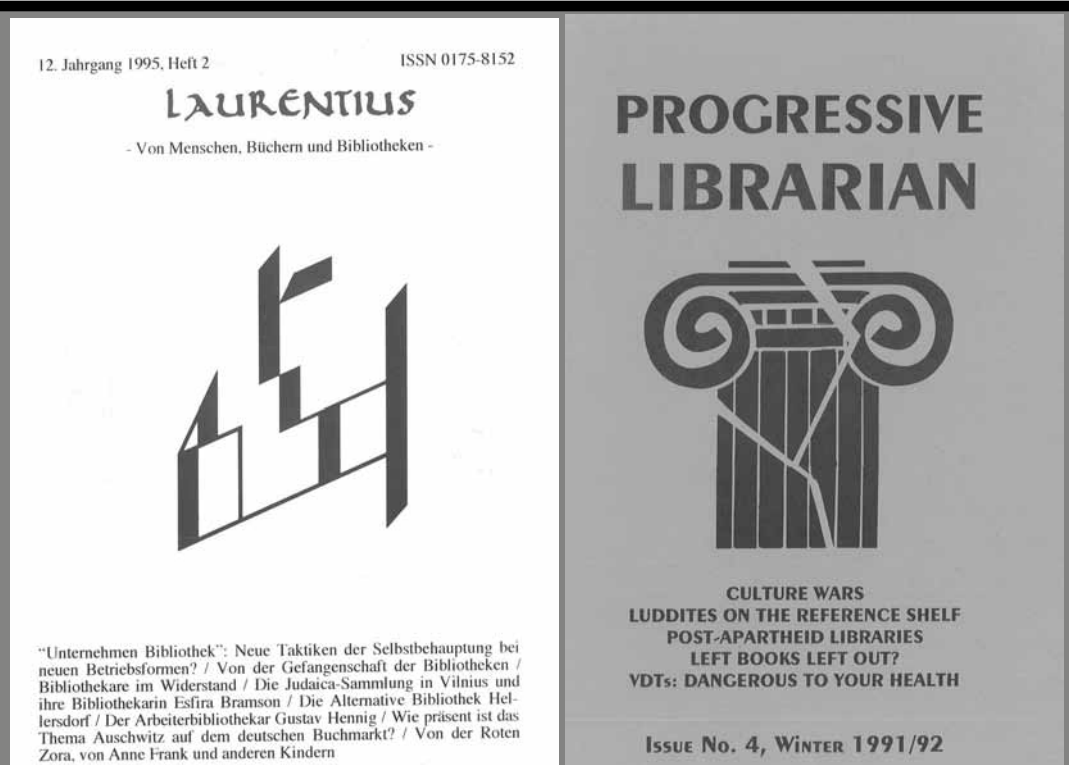




*Al Kagan intervjuar
Ingrid Atlestam*

before, but it has been great to get to know them a little better, and to meet others for the first time. It is wonderful to meet and spend time with people who share a deep political commitment, and who are still trying to make the world a little bit better in the face of such a generally depressing situation in North America and Europe. I have been shown extraordinary hospitality wherever I have gone, and let me especially now thank Lennart for arranging to bring several BiS activists to his summer home where we could talk and enjoy each

other's company for a few days. I have been fortunate to be able to combine work with pleasure, and spend some extra days in each country going to historical and art museums and generally enjoying the cultures. It was also lucky that the ISC's archives happen to be in Amsterdam, and I had a wonderful trip there this spring. As for writing, it has gone slower than I expected, but I am generally happy with the result so far.



What do you hope to accomplish?

I hope that the publication of this book will not only document the past, but also serve as a stimulus for a new generation of progressive librarians to get even more involved, and to organize to maintain libraries as a public good, influence our profession to maintain progressive values, and try to push our societies in more humane directions. My research validates a political conception of librarianship as a profession, one actor among many that normally reflects societal trends, but occasionally bravely stands out as an advocate for social justice in the face of hostile forces.