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THE ALA, PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION

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During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the American Library Association (ALA) became active in an alliance of public administrators, bank executives and teachers defending public spending from powerful populist anti-tax coalitions seeking drastic tax cuts as a solution to economic stagnation. Librarians were encouraged by the ALA to join the fight for ‘constructive economy’ that would reform and strengthen the role of public institutions. On the surface, this appears to be another example of the cyclical calls for library action that Michael Harris identified as characteristic of the profession’s history. But in this case, the threat was real and the campaign produced significant long-term change. Librarians and their institutions became part of a much broader set of social forces that served to re-establish the hegemony of the American state at a time when it was particularly vulnerable to attack. In fact, the ALA’s calls for ‘constructive economy’ foreshadowed and made possible the post-war Fordist compromise between monopoly capital, the state and organized labour. This article examines the role the ALA hoped libraries would play in the campaign against the anti-taxation groups and, using the work of social theorists Antonio Gramsci and Nicos Poulantzas, situates these efforts within the wider political economy of the time.

Introduction

The Great Depression left an indelible mark on the world. In the United States it lasted for a decade and shaped a generation’s attitude towards the state, society and culture. It was a time when Americans starved to death in their homes¹ and unemployment figures skyrocketed to around one quarter of the population.² William Leuchtenburg, a leading historian of the period, is certainly right to declare it ‘one of the turning points of American history’.³ In this paper I want to examine the role that the American Library Association (ALA) attempted to carve out for public libraries as active social agencies in response to what David Beito has described as ‘the greatest tax crisis of the twentieth century’.⁴

Previous work on the Great Depression and the library has applauded the efforts of individual librarians to spread the message of books across the country using whatever resources at hand. Mary Mallory has written of Mary Utopia Rothrock, the supervisor of library services for the Tennessee Valley Authority.⁵ Tommie Barker and Helen Beal,

also southern librarians, are similarly honoured by James Carmichael Jr.⁶ Other authors have had a broader focus. Charles Seavey argues that many local authorities were willing to establish libraries even during the darkest days of the Depression, suggesting something of their importance to the local community.⁷ Martha Swain has examined the national effect on libraries of federal relief aid⁸ and Michael Blayney has looked at the underlying philosophical aims of the New Deal administration and the library world in bringing ‘cultural democracy’ to the people of the United States.⁹

All of these authors consider librarians to have been active in shaping the destiny of their institutions and they also tell the story of how the federal government came to the rescue of the public library. However, with the exception of Seavey and Blayney, they have not focused on the role of the library as a social institution constituted by a set of economic, political and cultural relationships with wider society; relationships that during the turbulent years of the Depression were under considerable need of revision or repair. The work of Michael Harris helps to situate the library community within this larger perspective.

Library history, according to Harris, can be seen as a series of cycles with the driving engine being elite anxieties that are transmitted to the library community. A cycle begins with the identification of a particular threat to society and the establishment of the library as a means to overcome it. The library community fervently adopts the new mission as the central aim of its existence and promulgates various policies to attain this goal. Unfortunately, the passage of time either shows the inability of the community to affect change in the wider society or the nebulous status of the threat itself. According to Harris, when this happens, librarians return to an attitude of ‘somnolent and ambivalent attention to the mechanics of their role as custodians of the printed word’.¹⁰

Harris identifies a number of these cycles: ‘the evils of immoral fiction and the trivializing impact of low culture, 1876–1890; the dangers inherent in the new immigration of 1900–1910; the war to save America from the European threat, 1917–1919; and the crusade to protect Democracy from Facism, 1939–1950.’¹¹ Absent from this list is the library’s fight against the anti-tax protesters of the early 1930s. I would argue that this is yet another example of library missionary work, but of a different order — the threat was real and it was overcome through an alliance of powerful institutions with the library as a junior partner. To understand this threat and the library’s response we need to explore the nature of the United States’ political economy during the first half of the twentieth century.

Mass production, mass consumption and the state

The last quarter of the nineteenth century and roughly the first quarter of the twentieth century saw the productivity of the US economy grow at a tremendous rate. But, as economic historian Richard du Boff notes, this was not stable growth.¹² He argues that demand for the products manufactured by industry did not keep up with supply, since for most people wages did not rise fast enough to reflect the increased productivity gains. The gap between supply and demand created numerous crises of over-production and consequent recessions with 1929 being only the worst of these slumps. According to Du Boff’s analysis, what promised to rescue the economy from this bumpy ride was the

development of a consumer society that would redistribute productivity gains more evenly between capital and labour while at the same time encouraging everybody, through new forms of marketing and advertising, that life was all about buying commodities. However, by the end of the 1920s the consumer society was still in its infancy. In such a situation only the radical (for the time) intervention of the state in the economy, or more traditionally, through its involvement in a major war, could have inflated the economy sufficiently to overcome the drastic effects of depression. The old mechanisms of capital accumulation were not up to the task. However, this option was not so easy to pursue. To understand why, we need to look at the role of the state in capitalist society.

The nature of the capitalist state

There has been a great amount of debate over the nature of the capitalist state and its relations with civil society. For our purposes, the work of Nicos Poulantzas and Antonio Gramsci provide a useful framework. Gramsci considered that the capitalist state could not be conceived of as an entity separate from society for, he argued, it had roots in the class structure of that society and whatever power it exercised was therefore a reflection of wider class relations. For Gramsci, state power came in two forms, force and hegemony. Force was the use of direct coercion by state institutions — the army or police. Hegemony was a more complex concept that required the state to win over the dominated classes to the status quo through political, moral and intellectual leadership.¹³ This leadership was exercised through ideological apparatuses traditionally associated with the state in the form of schools or, not so traditionally, in institutions such as the media. Together, these forms of power were used by the state to achieve the perpetuation of the capitalist order, although Gramsci did not consider that the state would always be able to pull this off. In fact, his view was that the whole process was fraught with difficulties and obstacles.¹⁴

While Poulantzas shared these ideas about the need for the state to assert hegemony over the dominated classes, he also considered it equally necessary to put together some form of alliance (which he referred to as a power bloc) between the various factions of capital, since the capitalist class was divided based on where in the production or circulation process a particular capitalist is located.¹⁵ For Poulantzas, then, the state was a centre around which the cohesion of class-based and, therefore, divided societies could be built. Such a project involved establishing hegemony over both dominated and dominant classes. According to Poulantzas, this was accomplished through the simultaneous use of what he called isolation and unity effects. The state was continually involved in blocking class consciousness. This was the isolation effect. It worked at the economic level to structure social interactions on the basis of individual competition and at the political level to structure relationships between the population and itself on the basis of individual citizenship.¹⁶ The other side of the coin was the unity effect. Here the state attempted to persuade its population that their needs or aspirations for group identity could be achieved through allegiance to itself as the embodiment of the nation.¹⁷ Using both isolation and unity effects, the concept of class is banished and the state is allowed to get on with the process of guaranteeing as best it can the conditions for successful capital accumulation.

Rhonda Levine has used Gramsci and Poulantzas' work as a framework for understanding the American state's efforts to end the Depression.¹⁸ She argues that working-class militancy coupled with the fracturing of the capitalist class into monopoly and non-monopoly factions shaped the state's response to the economic crisis. Over the long-term the state was successful at putting together an alliance between, on the one hand, the larger, more profitable firms in most industries (what she terms monopoly capital), which stood to benefit from increased regulation and, on the other hand, industrial labour, which had been won over through compromise on the issue of collective bargaining. That monopoly capital and organized labour could work together was a result of generally higher level of profitability attained by large firms employing the latest technology and availing themselves of economies of scale.

Levine's analysis helps us to pinpoint the main political problem during the early years of the Great Depression; namely, that the economic conditions of the slump dulled the efficacy of the state in maintaining its hegemony over civil society, bringing out into the open conflict both between and within the capitalist class. The state's hegemonic control over its territory was thereby reduced and its ability to respond to the economic crisis diminished. In this environment it is easy to see how an anti-tax movement could take shape.

The attack on the state

David Beito examines this untimely attack on the state. He locates its rise in the inadequacy of local tax codes which had become seriously antiquated as a disproportionate amount of the revenue was collected from real estate rather than newer forms of property such as bank accounts, stocks and bonds. This unequal treatment created a sense of injustice among those whose principal investment was real estate¹⁹ and lead to the development of a popular movement aiming to limit the taxation power of governments. Various taxpayer organizations and associations campaigning for less taxation proliferated. An estimate made at the time put their numbers at between three and four thousand.²⁰ If the membership of the Chicago local taxpayer association can be taken as reasonably representative of the nation, then support for the movement was quite broad-based as it included substantial numbers of working-class (blue collar, skilled tradesmen and clerical workers), as well as middle-class (small proprietors and professionals) people.²¹ And it was a movement that got results as a flood of articles in the *National Municipal Review* testify.²² That it did not win more battles may be attributed to the response of the State's ideological supporters.

In Chicago teachers were especially vocal as they berated tax strikers for their lack of civic pride with the slogan 'Pay Your Taxes'.²³ Bankers and municipal bond dealers also became critical of the anti-tax movement as they worried about the possibility of default on interest payments and the repudiation of debt. Joining with the civil servants in the National Municipal League and reform-minded intellectuals they established the National Pay Your Taxes Campaign (NPYTC) in late 1932 or early 1933.²⁴ At its centre, the NPYTC was an attempt to co-opt more moderate anti-tax opponents, thereby reducing the broad base of support that the tax resistance movement enjoyed. The philosophical heart of the campaign was the notion of constructive economy. Constructive economy accepted the need for government to look at its institutions and services with a

critical eye to reducing expenditure, but stressed that this could only be done by careful study. Reform of government, not its reduction or even stabilization at a steady level of expenditure, was the best policy. And in these efforts, constructive economy called upon all citizens to do their part through participation in Citizens' Councils for Constructive Economy (CCCE), an organization formed at the suggestion of the ALA's Secretary, Carl Milam.²⁵

Implications of the response

On the surface these actions appear to reflect only the immediate interests of the actors involved. Civil servants, teachers, and librarians joined forces to save their jobs. Bankers and bondholders joined them in order to secure a steady revenue stream. However, if we examine what happened through the lens of state theory as discussed above, these actions take on added significance. We can see the only partially conscious work of ideological apparatuses engaged in the task of repairing hegemony and cementing class alliances. They did this by attempting to break up a movement with some potential to unify a significant portion of the working class independently of the state and re-imposing the state as the site of the political unification of the people. Among their strategies was denigrating the leaders of the anti-tax movement as being essentially selfish and uninterested in the broader social good, including the immediate interests of their followers. The philosophy of constructive economy offered an added means to break whatever unity existed among the tax protesters by showing how the state might re-appropriate for itself the role of representing the population of its territory. It encouraged citizens to look not to their own devices, institutions and relationships, but to those provided by the state. Furthermore, it encouraged them to adopt the channels for participation that had been established by the Citizens' Councils for Constructive Economy as a concrete way in which state hegemony could be re-asserted.

The ALA and the CCCE

It is not surprising that Milam, who was ALA secretary at the time, was keen to work with the government on depression-related issues. He had been extensively involved in efforts during the First World War to provide library services to soldiers fighting overseas and believed that librarians were inordinately reticent about publicizing their worth to the public at large, a characteristic that he considered a serious shortcoming in their quest for recognition and funding. During the years of economic turmoil that marked the 1930s, Milam was acutely aware of the danger that faced public libraries, but at the same time he recognized in the crisis opportunity as well. Milam hoped the ALA's work with government agencies could be translated into blanket federal support for a nationwide public library system sometime in the future. At the same time, he wanted to see libraries working more closely with each other in order to provide more efficient services to the public.²⁶

Through Carl Milam, the ALA supported the aims of the CCCE, and in so doing it began a round of library missionary activity of the kind identified by Harris at the

beginning of this article. The favourable attitude of the ALA towards the CCCE is clearly evident in the pages of its newsletter, the *Bulletin of the ALA*. Shortly after the call for the creation of citizens' councils in early 1933, the *Bulletin* published an appeal for librarians to not only get involved in establishing such councils, but to take the lead in doing so: 'Do not wait for others ... Call up those who you know are likely to be interested and make plans for an early preliminary meeting.' The call for action emphasized the ALA's support of the initiative, noting that the association was: 'eager that some member of the library board or the head librarian in each community shall assume his full share of the responsibility for bringing a citizens' council into existence.'²⁷ In the same issue, another article provided more information about the councils, including their objectives (turn demands for tax cuts into demands for efficient and improved government services and preserve community services), methods (collect information about government services and their costs, for example), as well as a list of those individuals currently involved in building councils. Subsequent issues reported the publicity achieved by the program in terms of newspaper and magazine stories, as well as the activities some of the local councils were taking. The New York City council, for example, was 'concentrating ... at present on making recommendations for the revision of the New York City charter' while a number of conferences were to be held at the state level to 'help local citizens' councils ... with their problems'.²⁸ Other councils were reported to be involved in gaining 'support for schools and libraries, stiffening tax collections, for reorganizing various functions of local government, for study of city budgets, for cooperating with city officials in law enforcement, for public education in civil matters and for many other worth while purposes'.²⁹ A number of articles addressed the principles of constructive government. Paul Wager, for example, a professor of rural social economics, had his presentation to the Conference of Southern Leaders published in the *Bulletin*. Wager argued that it was necessary to consolidate small local governments into larger units in order for government to provide its services more efficiently.³⁰

Attempts were also made to convince readers of the important or positive role government played in the life of the nation. Gratia Countryman, President of ALA for 1933–1934, praised the government for being:

the greatest agency of all in stimulating thought ... One hears workmen on the street and in the shops discussing what the government is doing. Everybody watches eagerly for the daily paper to see what new plan the President proposes and what Congress is going to do about it. The common man heretofore has been paying little attention to his government. It was a far-away and vague factor in his life. Now it has suddenly assumed a close relation to him.³¹

In contrast to this picture of the virtue of government, the *Bulletin of the ALA* presented an unflattering portrait of the tax-resisters. They were at best ignorant of the realities confronting governments and especially public libraries. Judge Ora Wildermuth, a library trustee in Gary, Indiana, for example, described the representatives of taxpayers' associations he met with at library board meetings as perfectly normal people, 'no different ... from those who composed the board' and 'all interested in exactly the same thing we were interested in'. For him the only difference was 'the knowledge of the library that we had gained in twenty-five years of service on its board'. This meant that they could be reasoned with, and educated about the role the public library played in society. But Wildermuth also cautioned that 'there are taxpayers' associations ... whose only purpose in life is to reduce somebody's taxes and it does not matter where they hit

or what they destroy. With those associations, of course, none of us interested in the social order of things can have any accord'.³² Others were of the opinion that this second category of members of the tax-payer associations was predominant in the movement at large. Ralph Shanesy's view on the matter was that, despite efforts to educate the ignorant, 'some voice [would be] raised in the city council calling for a slash'. For Shanesy these individuals and the movements supporting them were unreasonable and their motives questionable: 'they will not ... sit down and go into the proposition thoroughly, with a conservative, honest, sincere intention of doing what is best for the community'.³³ Frank Tolman was also of the opinion that the tax-payer associations were unreasonable in their 'savage and bitter' attacks on government. Their demands made governing 'an impossible task' and led to 'the axe [being] used with vigor and sometimes with little discrimination' on government spending. Tolman also questioned the motives of at least some of the leaders of the association, claiming that the 'representatives of large business interests with ulterior motives' were behind much of the movement.³⁴ James Weadock of the Ohio Library Trustees Association claimed to 'fear the taxpayers' leagues and the committees that are springing up in every community' precisely because of their irrational commitment to 'cut salaries, cut budgets, cut everything, just to show that government is not going to cost so much any more'. But for him, unlike Shanesy, this irrationality had limits. Thinking along the lines of Wildermuth, Weadock believed that the tax-payer association members could be reasoned with through appeals to self-interest. Using a theme that we will see again shortly, he suggested that the representatives of the associations be reminded that the public library provided a place for the dispossessed to 'feed their minds' and that 'if the politician should ... cut off some of our libraries ... revolution would foment in those minds more quickly than in any other minds in the world'. He was confident that this prospect would convince the representatives to rethink their plans.³⁵

While these articles were aimed primarily at the library world, the ALA was also involved in the crusade over constructive economy taking place in the wider society. Carl Milam appeared, along with Wildermuth and L. Woolhiser (a city manager in Illinois), on a radio show entitled 'How to Reduce the Library Budget' which was broadcast over the National Broadcasting Network in the summer of 1933. The transcript of the broadcast emphasizes the ties between the need for libraries and good, efficient government.³⁶ Milam was also involved in heading the National Conference on Social Work which took place in Kansas City in May of 1934 and helping the ALA sponsor the Conference of Southern Leaders at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Both of these conferences dealt with the issue of government and taxation at length.³⁷

The ALA also contributed to the campaign for constructive economy in a yet more subtle way by positioning the library as a valuable social agency and encouraging librarians themselves to take action towards its support. In a series of articles in the *Bulletin of the ALA*, a set of four potential roles for the public library can be identified that could be used to strengthen the arguments of librarians when they were rallying support from their communities when they were in conflicts with local politicians or leaders of tax-payer organizations. These roles can be interpreted as providing encouragement for the citizen to re-identify with state, in the form of loyalty to the public library, a state agency. The library was portrayed as mediating between the individual and the rest of society. Mediation had both 'giving' and 'protecting' functions. Through the library

citizens could be given access to practical instruction, as well as to the ‘finer’ cultural things of life, while also being protected against the forces of anarchy and disorder.

i. The library as giver

a. Practical information

Much in favour at the ALA was the idea that the library could provide training in useful skills for people recently unemployed or those struggling to make ends meet. Two illustrations in an article appearing in the organization’s *Bulletin* clearly illustrate this point.³⁸ One is captioned: ‘Housewives make home products for sale from recipes secured at the library’; the other: ‘Jobless men earn a living at all sorts of handicraft guided by library books.’ In the transcript of the radio show ‘How to Reduce the Library Budget’, we see a reflection of the way in which librarians liked to recount stories or informally collected statistics on the users of their libraries to show how important the public library was as a centre of training in the community. Here is one scenario of activities in a public library reading room:

A woman who makes scarfs to sell was getting some new designs. A man who was experimenting at home with a new varnish was getting a formula. A middle-aged man, who was trading his city home for a farm, wanted to know all about the soil and climate of the locality. A young engineer wanted everything available on subway building — for a civil service examination.

Another is a library trustee story:

I picked up a man coming into town one morning with his arms full of books. In response to my inquiry, he said, ‘I am studying because I have nothing else to do. I have lost my job. This is the way I have it figured out: when things open up there aren’t going to be jobs enough to go around and I think they are going to take the man that is best prepared and I want to be prepared.’³⁹

Of course the notion that individuals could survive economically by opening small businesses and acquiring new skills reflected more hope than effective action on the matter of unemployment. One has only to be reminded of the New York apple sellers to be disabused of the likelihood of these strategies working to any great extent. In 1930 farmers in Oregon and Washington started to use the unemployed to peddle apples in New York City and later in other large centres. At first, the reaction was positive, but this quickly changed. Pedlars were accused of unfair competition with local merchants and some citizens declared them a hazard due to the possibility of stepping on discarded apple cores. President Hoover’s remark that ‘many persons left their jobs for the more profitable one of selling apples’, as reported by Ellis, strains the bounds of the believable as the profit from this ‘occupation’ worked out to about ninety-five cents a day.⁴⁰ Despite this example of the precariousness of such petty forms of capitalist enterprise, the library continued to justify its existence as a place where people could develop their entrepreneurial talents.

b. Cultural and spiritual enrichment

The public library was also considered capable of satisfying the cultural needs of the community, needs that the contributors to the *Bulletin* likened to the physical needs of

that same community. ‘Man shall not live by bread alone’ was the biblical quote used by one author to describe the cultural value of the public library.⁴¹ Gratia Countryman argued that the current reduction of working hours would continue in the future as a new form of leisure society was born. For her the library was essential to insure that this leisure became a boon and not a curse.⁴² In library trustee R. C. Platt’s view, libraries assumed even a spiritual significance: ‘because the library is an element in that world of intangibles which form the spiritual home for the common life of the citizen. Books are but prosaic messengers of the human spirit.’⁴³ Unemployment was not, according to William Bailey, a professor of sociology, the worst effect of economic collapse. Instead, in an address delivered to the Council of the ALA in 1932, he declared that ‘the most serious side of this depression are the many indications of what might be called cultural collapse’.⁴⁴ He was concerned that the public library would be a victim of these developments and that as a result people would lose the ‘perspective on life’ that books provided and which he believed was ‘the primary function of the library’ to deliver.

2. The library as protector

a. An anti-revolutionary device

Many of those who managed to escape the full rigours of the economic meltdown viewed those less fortunate than themselves in an intensely negative light. People receiving welfare from the government were seen as potentially dangerous and definitely suspicious. Fingerprinting, restrictions on buying alcohol, even removal of the right to vote from those on relief were contemplated as just measures to protect the rest of society from idleness or revolution.⁴⁵ Contributors to the *ALA Bulletin* capitalized on this general fear of the unemployed by pointing out the usefulness of the public library as a mechanism for social control. They encouraged the idea that the library, by keeping the masses busy with reading, would prevent the spread of revolutionary thought.

Gratia Countryman claimed that libraries moulded character and that this function needed emphasis in times of stress:

It is a tragic fact that a gradual moral deterioration has been taking place and that our national problems are a result of a breakdown of moral character. All the educational forces, ourselves, not least, must be enlisted in an effort to restore right standards of private and public morality ... A generation of competent, vigorous, intelligent young people, seeking vainly for any employment, questioning the social order that denies them work and opportunity — they are turning, some to the road, some to crime and many to indifferent and ambitionless idleness.⁴⁶

R. C. Platt believed that the public needed to understand the need for social spending in a democracy because it was the only way to forestall revolution which, he argued, was only likely ‘when men have become dissatisfied with their spiritual home’. For him it was clear that the library provided such a home and by fulfilling this responsibility it became part of the social standards that society should maintain: ‘American democracy, having pledged itself to a social minimum for 125,000,000 of people, must gird its loins to redeem that pledge — or repudiate it. The library is a part of that social minimum and cultural values are not an extravagance in a democracy. They may prove its salvation.’⁴⁷

A Canadian librarian (and former President of the ALA), George Locke, shared similar views. He lauded the provision of books as a ‘remedy for all those ‘isms’ which, to his mind, clouded ‘the economic and the social atmosphere’ of the day. Libraries could ‘help to clear the air and show the best of all reasons to our emotional friends — that nothing is new under the sun and that they can read of those who have had dreams such as they’.⁴⁸ Here again the library is seen as providing an antidote for the disaffection of the masses. Through the careful selection of appropriate materials, the library was seen as well placed to temper what were thought to be the extravagant and unrealistic thoughts of those on the wrong side of the class divide. In this way the library would safeguard the interests of those with more to lose by an interruption of the status quo.

b. A stimulus for thought about the depression

To the idea of the anti-revolutionary role of the library was the added belief that by reading and reflecting on the right books, an educated citizenry could develop a rational solution to the depression. A poster slogan used in the Minneapolis library sums up the link between this and the previous role: ‘Turn discontent to constructive reform. Save the Library.’ The contributors to the *Bulletin* constantly emphasized that large numbers of people were turning to the public library in order to learn about the crisis that had engulfed them. Carl Milam, in the transcript to the radio show ‘How to Reduce the Budget’ mentioned previously, stated that the demand for books had risen since the beginning of the crisis: ‘there is more demand now than at any time in a generation for facts and ideas on economic, social and governmental questions.’⁴⁹ Other librarians stressed the potential role of the library in meeting this demand. Frank Tolman believed that the crisis gave libraries a new reason for being because they ‘typify intelligence and wisdom’ and were storehouses ‘of solutions of difficulties, of helpful hints, of forgotten clues, of missing links’. He wanted ‘every library busy in trying to put everyone to work on the solution of the great Chinese puzzle of depression’.⁵⁰ Countryman voiced similar beliefs, declaring that librarianship would: ‘move out to a new front and become one of the most dynamic influences for bringing about a permanent social reconstruction.’⁵¹

The important point about the discussion of the roles I have identified above is that they provided ammunition for librarians to use in the local fight against the tax resisters in the battle to re-establish state hegemony. The ALA realized that little good would come from the passive acceptance of these roles by the library community at large. For this reason, librarians were encouraged in the pages of the *Bulletin* to go out and ‘spread the word’. Countryman, for example, spoke of sacrifice:

I am talking about sacrifice of our own time and energy, our own dedication to the promotion of our splendid objectives to such an extent as to carry conviction to an ever enlarging influential group. I am talking about using all of our powers of leadership, all of our educational abilities and our personality to sell completely this institution whose functions we so thoroughly believe in. Dreaming about it is one thing, acting about it is another.⁵²

Others spoke in different terms, but the meaning was the same — get involved. The director of the Evanston, Illinois Public Library, Ralph Shanesy, advised trustees and librarians to fight their opponents:

I feel that no matter how much preaching you do, no matter how much press work you do, no matter how earnest are your endeavors to convince people of the value of your

institutions, you will be still be unsuccessful unless you do something else. That something else, in my opinion, is, ... fight ...⁵³

Conclusion

By the middle of the 1930s the advocates of constructive economy had gained ascendancy over proponents of government restraint at all costs. Beito notes that by the end of 1933, the tone of the reformers was far more optimistic than in the two previous years and that by 1936 only one new tax limitation law passed voter scrutiny.⁵⁴ Beito provides a number of reasons for the declining fortune of the anti-tax movement. The economy had improved and this provided relief to property owners (but Beito fails to note that this recovery was not long-lasting). Perhaps more important was the initiative of the Federal government. It established the Home Owners' Loan Corporation and made it a requirement that communities receiving Public Works Administration funding contribute a substantial amount of the costs themselves.⁵⁵ However, of ultimate importance to the failure of the anti-tax movement was its lack of a solid base of knowledge and unified support in comparison with its opponents in the NPYTC and the CCCE, whose members had long been involved with issues of government reform and knew exactly what they wanted to achieve (and what they stood to lose if the anti-tax movement succeeded).⁵⁶

It is clear that the ALA supported the aims of the NPYTC and the CCCE and worked on their behalf both in and outside the library world. By doing so they were part of a movement that helped turn public opinion away from the traditional policy of retrenchment during depressed economic times and towards an increased role for an expansionary state fiscal policy. During the rest of the decade the ALA turned its attention to establishing an institutional framework and supporting legislation for federal government aid to public libraries across the country. Its attempts, while not initially successful, helped to build a foundation for the state intervention in civil society that took place after the Second World War which involved among other things the provision of support for libraries.⁵⁷ From this point of view, the role of the ALA in helping to resist the anti-taxation movement of the 1930s represents one cycle of library history that did unexpectedly and atypically, if Harris is right, have a positive and lasting outcome.

¹ E. Ellis, *A nation in torment: the great American depression, 1929–1939* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970) 242.

² R. Du Boff, *Accumulation and power: an economic history of the United States* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe Inc., 1980) 91.

³ W. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932–1940* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) xv.

⁴ D. Beito, *Taxpayers in revolt: tax resistance during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) xiv.

⁵ M. Mallory, The rare vision of Mary Utopia Rothrock: organizing regional library services in the Tennessee Valley, *Library Quarterly* 65:1 (1995) 62–88.

⁶ J. Carmichael, North Carolina libraries face the Depression, *North Carolina Libraries* 50 (Spring 1992) 35–40.

⁷ C. Seavey, The American public library during the Great Depression, *Library Review* 52:8 (2003) 373–78.

⁸ M. Swain, A New Deal in libraries: federal relief work and library service, 1933–1943, *Libraries and Culture* 30:3 (1995) 265–83.

⁹ M. Blayney, 'Libraries for the millions': adult public library services and the New Deal, *Journal of Library History* 12:3 (1977) 235–49.

¹⁰ M. Harris, Portrait in paradox: commitment and ambivalence in American librarianship, 1876–1976, *Libri* 26:4 (1976) 284.

- ¹¹ Harris, Portrait in paradox, 284.
- ¹² Du Boff, *Accumulation and power*.
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