

Intellectual Freedom Committee Annual Report: 2011-2012

By Jon Scop.

Addressing Issues of Intellectual Freedom

The IFC continues to advocate for an issue involving unnecessary labeling. Many library systems are adopting Bibliocommons as their primary catalogues. Among Bibliocommons' many features is a "notice" option, in which patrons may flag library items for "coarse language," "graphic violence" or "sexual content." The IFC believes that this feature encourages the labeling of items, exalts these three factors over other objections patrons may have, and is completely unnecessary given the open-ended "comments" feature of the catalogue. In June, IFC Chair Jon Scop and BCLA Acting Executive Director Errin Morrison met with two representatives of the BC Library Co-op, through which BC libraries contract with Bibliocommons. Subsequently, we were informed that Bibliocommons would remove labels from this feature. However, in late 2011 we learned that the vendor had only changed the format of the feature and had in fact added more labels. Early this year we contacted the Intellectual Freedom Office of the American Library, who indicated substantial interest in the issue. We are currently awaiting more information and will proceed in conjunction with the ALA or on our own.

On September 18, a pro-Palestinian group held a public meeting in one of the downstairs meeting rooms at the Central Branch of Vancouver Public Library. Both prior to and following the meeting, Chief Librarian Sandra Singh, as well as others including Mayor Gregor Robertson, received several letters from pro-Israel groups and individuals. They objected to the use of the library meeting room for the pro-Palestinian event. Ms. Singh responded

appropriately and affirmed the use of the meeting room. The IFC and BCLA sent Ms. Singh a letter supporting her decision and thanking her for upholding principles of intellectual freedom. At a subsequent VPL Board of Trustees meeting where the objecting groups were expected to speak, IFC members Beth Davies and BCLA President Christopher Kevlahan spoke to the Board in support of the library's action.

In December, sixteen months after the IFC expressed its concerns regarding the widespread curtailment of free speech during the 2010 G20 Summit, we received a reply from Minister of Public Safety Vic Toews.

2011 BC Library Conference

The IFC sponsored "A Century of Censorship Challenges in BC," an informative session by long-time intellectual freedom activist Dr. Ann Curry, at last year's conference in Victoria.

Outreach

In late March, Jon Scop spoke with the students of a first-term core class at SLAIS about the IFC and BCLA. Students were encouraged to get involved with BCLA, to attend the two IFC-sponsored sessions at this year's BC Library Conference, as well as our social event, co-sponsored with the Information Policy Committee and the LGBTQ Interest Group.

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