

Excerpt from the Newsletter of the State, Court, and County Law Libraries Special Interest Section of the American Association of Law Libraries, v. 25, #4, Fall 1999:

Charley's Corner:

VOTE YES on the Bylaw Amendment!!!

by Charles R. Dyer, Director of Libraries, San Diego County Public Law Library
Nothing in this column represents the view of my Library or its Board of Trustees. These are just my personal opinions.

When our stalwart editor, Lisa Mecklenberg, asked for writers for the newsletter at the AALL Meeting in July, I told her I always wanted to do a "curmudgeon column" and asked if she would like to have one. Since I was the first one to speak to her, she felt obligated to say yes. She needed copy, and who knows whether anyone else would offer at all. Of course, several others spoke up eventually, and now she's stuck with me.

The next hurdle was the name. With a last name like Dyer, the puns can be vicious. But I'll let you make them up later after you read a few of my columns. We'll go with "Charley's Corner" for now.

Choosing the topic is not hard. I told Lisa that I would only do articles that I can rattle off the top of my head. She warned me that she planned to do "theme issues," and, of course, her first email asked if I could stick with the issue theme this time, i.e., the AALL Meeting in Washington, DC, and SCCLL SIS business at the meeting. As it happens, I have something to mouth off about that fits right in, so, for now, I'll play the game.

Let's talk about OPEN MEMBERSHIP. You've seen my comments before, so it probably comes as no surprise that I attended the SCCLL Executive Board Meeting (I was a committee co-chair.) and offered a resolution that the Executive Board go on record as supporting the AALL Executive Board's new membership bylaw. While the new bylaw is not perfect, it goes a lot further toward treating our trustees and other governing officials with more respect. The SCCLL Executive Board agreed, and even allowed me to write the resolution on the spot. Fortunately, I had some facts at my command as I intended to speak at the AALL Business Meetings myself. Our new chair, Shirley David, graciously offered to read the resolution at the AALL Business Meeting. That gave me the chance to get up on my own and say some of my pithier remarks.

You can read about the Business meeting remarks in the official AALL minutes. But I was overly proud of my closing paragraph:

"And to the nay-sayers, I say that this Association is already controlled enough by vendors that they don't need to vote. Without West, Lexis and the others, we could not even pull off these annual meetings. In fact, I believe you'll find that library users, trustees and so forth, once they become members of AALL, they will remind us of our purpose and will provide us with the backbone to go head to head with vendors when it is needed. Trustees don't have jobs to lose, they have something much more valuable, their libraries. We are only caretakers. We need to let the owners in."

The San Diego County Public Law Library Board of Trustees sent two trustees to the AALL Meeting. The Board sent them without much prompting from me, without any contribution from outside sources, and without dinging the regular travel budget meant for

librarians. I had simply informed them of the programs at the meeting intended for trustees and similar people and had mentioned that there was some grant money available. (We didn't get any grants, because other trustees at other law libraries more deserving and more connected, in the good sense, with what was going on were given them.) Frankly, I was startled, and proud to have them there, just as if this were the regular thing to do. It should be. And AALL and the SCCLL SIS should always have some programming for trustees.

The American Library Association and most state library organizations have sections or round tables for trustees, typically from the public libraries. We have held a caucus two years in a row of trustees and librarians at AALL, so we can start a new trustees' SIS after our third meeting next year in Philadelphia.

To start that new and needed SIS though, we really need to get the new bylaw through. A mail ballot is coming out. Vote YES, please. All we need is a simple majority of the people voting, but this issue has been hanging around for fifteen years, and a loss at this stage would doom it for a couple of decades. Why do we need the bylaw to have the new SIS? Well, it takes fifty *voting* members to petition for a new SIS, and I for one would be totally embarrassed if none of the fifty voting members were trustees themselves.

This whole situation of distrusting the vendors, as if they are even interested in taking over the Association, is silly. No matter what "pro-vendor" view might emanate from some vendor's strong influence on some committee, everyone would know from whom it came. A good, open discussion is only available if we invite the "other side" in to talk. The American Library Association actually encourages vendors to join. And many of us are becoming vendors anyway, what with selling fee-based services, publishing local and even statewide primary sources, becoming ISP's, contracting to provide outsourced professional librarian services to courts, government agencies, and local law firms, and doing corporate partnerships in fund raising. Let's not even begin to discuss contracting out the publication of court reports and appellate briefs. What was that that Pogo said?