

October 12, 2002

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Dear Nancy,

Your welcome letter of October 7th concludes with a generous invitation to "let me know if you have any other questions or constructive comments." Well, I do. So here goes:

1. Unanswered communications

+My 9-17-02 missive to Charles Brown cited 18 messages, largely concerning cataloging and magazine selection, the earliest dated 8-16-01. You assure me "that the appropriate staff is reviewing your suggestions and comments as your letters arrive." If that's truly the case, why have I still received no acknowledgment, much less substantive response, to any of those communications? I repeat that this ongoing and total failure to reply to serious and constructive queries and recommendations is uncivil, rude, discourteous, and arrogant. It is also sorely tempting to believe that this consistent pattern of non-response represents a deliberate, orchestrated attempt to ostracize me and ignore my views.

+How could it conceivably require over 13 months to "review" such suggestions as adding a subject tracing for WORKING POOR PEOPLE to Barbara Ehrenreich's Nickel and Dimed and correcting contents note mistakes for Alternative Library Literature, 1998/1999? Or to explain why the myriad "public notes" developed at HCL over nearly three decades did not display in WEBCAT?

2. Contracted-out web reference

+You report that Library Systems and Services (LSSI) will "provide online live reference assistance" during HCL's closed hours. You note that "LSSI has been in business for 20 years, and has an established relationship with many libraries..." What you pointedly neglect to mention is that LSSI is notorious as a firm that operates public libraries for profit. It is, in short, an agent or mechanism for privatizing public services. As Peter Benner and other AFSCME officers demonstrate in the attached 10-12-02 Star Tribune essay, privatization clearly imperils service quality, local control, and accountability. The HCL/LSSI deal is most unsavory, a threatening step toward further outsourcing of basic library functions, which has been vigorously condemned by the American Library Association.

+I originally asked: "Will those distant reference librarians be competent to refer users to relevant local (i.e., Minnesota and Twin Cities) resources: libraries, archives, government agencies, nonprofits, and individual experts?" You did not answer this question.

+I queried: "Why were system reference staff not consulted beforehand?" You say my "information...is erroneous." To my knowledge, no frontline reference staff, not even the Southdale Information Services Principal Reference Services Librarian, were either informed or consulted in advance. Certainly the Librarians Union was not, although its membership includes all frontline professionals and its contract declares that the group should be consulted by management on policy matters. So who was consulted?

3. Discarded books

+I alleged that "thousands of library books have been tossed into dumpsters at Ridgedale." You retort that my "informant may have misinterpreted something he or she observed." Nice try, but my several eyewitness "informants" reaffirm not only that discards number in the thousands, but that many are obviously of current interest and value. I suggest that your "informants"--doubtless self-protecting managers--may have misinformed you. The disparity between what my on-the-scene, disinterested staff contacts assert and what your manager-sources contend is so great that an investigation by the County Attorney's office seems warranted.

+You aver that before deciding to pulp library materials, they "were offered to other organizations." What organizations?

4. Novelist

+What, exactly, is the "business relationship" that will "continue" with NoveList? And for how long will it continue?

5. HCL database/Authority File

+My concern regarding post-licensing database searching was whether the bibliographic database and authority file would be interactively linked, thus permitting searchers to find cross-references and public notes.

+Inasmuch as the impending catalog demolition was announced in March 2002 and it is now nearly November 2002, why was the salvage operation not pursued with greater energy and speed? At this moment, the former catalog database and authority file are not available to anyone, even though they constitute an enormous investment of time, dollars, and creativity.

With best wishes,

Sanford Berman

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cc: R. P. Johnson, Deputy Hennepin County Administrator
Mary Tambornino, Hennepin County Board of Commissioners
Amy Klobuchar, Hennepin County Attorney