

MEETING ON OVERSEAS TRAVEL FOR AREA SPECIALISTS

The American Council on Education has recently, with the assistance of a Ford grant, undertaken a project directed toward exploring the possibility of greater coordination among the various Federal agencies which offer programs aiding international education and concomitantly better liaison between these agencies and the academic community. Such coordination would, hopefully, involve wider dissemination of information on Federal programs in the general field of international affairs and would provide an opportunity for the academic community in general to have direct contact with a central office which would have available the fullest possible information on opportunities for academic travel and study overseas at all levels.

As part of the preliminary groundwork for the project, a series of five Task Forces have been appointed. These will deal with:

1. Government-Academic Interface.
2. Transnational Collaborative Research.
3. Diffusion Technology and Mechanism.
4. Language Competence.
5. Overseas Professional Skill Reinforcement.

Each of these Task Forces will have representatives of government agencies and the academic community as members. I have been asked to Chair the Task Force dealing with Overseas Professional Skill Reinforcement. The task of this particular group will be to deal primarily with problems of long and short visits abroad by academics, particularly those already trained in Area Studies. The focus of the inquiry will be directed toward visits by faculty members rather than with research being carried on for a doctoral dissertation. The group will be concerned with such problems as:

1. The advisability of short-term vs. long-term visits.
2. The duration and frequency of "up-dating" visits.
3. The desirability of this type of visit as opposed to year-long research visits.
4. The most suitable mechanisms for the arrangements of such visits.
5. The most appropriate form of programs of Federal aid under which visits, long or short, might be conducted.

In order to get some sampling of opinion on these and related questions, I would most welcome the help of members of the African Studies Association. Please let me have any suggestions which you may wish to offer. These, in due course, will be transmitted to the Task Force. They will be of the greatest value to the Task Force in the formulation of its final report within the next few months.

I will be most grateful for your help.

Dean L. GRAY COWAN
Graduate School of Administration
SUNY-Albany
Albany, New York 12203

•••••

LETTER

Shortly after the presentation of my report on behalf of the Committee on Current Issues at the business meeting of November 2, 1973, the meeting passed a resolution calling upon the United States Government to recognize the recently proclaimed Republic of Guinea Bissau. The adoption of this political resolution contravened the claim made in my report to the effect that the African Studies Association may have discovered an acceptable alternative to the competing poles of political partisanship and retreat from direct involvement with politically controversial issues. Most of the members present at this meeting clearly preferred outright partisanship. Although I agree with the substance of the Guinea Bissau resolution and have signed a petition to that effect, I opposed its adoption by the meeting on the ground that it is a grave mistake for our Association to adopt political resolutions of any kind. I trust that this viewpoint will not lack spokesmen within our Association despite its overwhelming defeat at Syracuse.

Resolutions which call upon the African Studies Association to take official positions on political matters appear to enlist two kinds of support. First, they are supported by those who simply believe that scholarly membership associations should take sides on political issues. Some of those who advocate partisanship also subscribe to the nonsensical notion that failure to pass a resolution supporting or condemning something is equivalent to the endorsement of a contrary viewpoint.

The African Studies Association is not based on unity of belief; it is united by the common interest of its members in professional study, teaching, and research. The members of this Association have strong views on all sides of burning political questions. Often people who have similar values have conflicting opinions on political matters. The recurring tendency to declare some opinions official at the expense of others should always be resisted because it undermines a basic premise of scholarship—that truth is a matter of individual determination. Truth cannot be determined by voting: one person may be right when everyone else is wrong. Official positions imposed by majorities are coercive in character and contrary to the pursuit of truth. At the very least, an official position establishes a standard of conformity that is incompatible with the heterodox ideal of a scholarly association.

A second source of support for the adoption of resolutions relating to the liberation of Africa is more substantial than a mere partiality for partisanship. Many members of the ASA perceive the existence of a conflict between the value of diversity in a scholarly association and the value of commitment to the African freedom movement. If any such conflict really does exist, there is no question that African freedom must take precedence. Racial oppression is intolerable and, to my mind, its abolition is even more important than respect for diversity of opinion. However, there is no real conflict between these values; consequently, there is no need to violate a sound principle in order to take a moral and liberationist stand on the issues of racial or colonial domination in Africa.

On the contrary, if this Association permits itself to be used as a political pressure group, it will seriously weaken its actual and potential ability to influence public policy. Its credibility and standing as an association of professional scholars will be gravely impaired; it will be regarded as being just another partisan pressure group. As a scholarly association, the ASA can make its mark on public policy if the public believes that it is open-minded and untrammelled by official positions. As soon as it becomes a partisan group, it will be labelled as such and dismissed as inconsequential.

Our resort to the adoption of political resolutions will prove to be an enormous tactical blunder as well as a sacrifice of good principle. It may also prove to be counter-productive for the cause of liberation. Those who have promoted this course of action will be judged by history for the damage they have done. As in the case of scholarly truth, liberationist or revolutionary truth cannot be determined by majority vote. For myself, I remain convinced that the most effective means for our Association to promote liberation is to resist the imposition of conformism. Therefore, I hope that we will devise means to dissociate political resolutions from the conduct of our official business.

RICHARD L. SKLAR



ASA FINANCIAL STATEMENT (January 1, 1973–September 30, 1973)

CASH ON HAND

Cambridge Savings Bank	\$ 9,586.45
State Street Bank (Investment Portfolio)†	45,000.00
Newton Waltham Bank & Trust Co.	<u>132.24</u>
Total	\$ 54,718.69