

Power to the People

The ALA Constitution and Bylaws Committee is recommending a bylaw change that will require 5% of the voting membership to sign a petition nominating someone to run for Council (See Article III, Sec. 3 (b)). The present bylaw requirement states that any 100 members may petition for the nomination of a candidate. This means that while the five members of the official committee can place any names they select on the ballot, it will take close to 1500 Association members to do the same thing!

This proposed bylaw change is retrogressive, less democratic and creates an impossible stumbling block - especially in sparsely populated regions - the members who wish to add names to the election ballot. It is completely contrary to the recommendations to be submitted by the New Directions Committee (ACOMDA).

In an Association which prides itself on its democratic and liberal reputation, it is surprising to see a trend to establish difficult procedures for membership action and participation. It is also interesting to note that this bylaw recommendation was submitted at the very time members exercised their right of petition to Council for the first time in the history of the Association.

Consider, if you will, the plight of the librarian far removed from an urban area. His or her ability to gather signatures for a petition is already taxed to the fullest by the present Constitutional requirement that 100 or 200 names of personal members be attached. To ask these librarians to gather some 1400 names [5% of 29,000] is impossible.

Similarly, a group within ALA such as the Black Caucus might well encounter difficulties in gathering this large group of signatures, yet their voice is one that ALA cannot and must not cut off. Two lawyers on the Committee advised that 5% of the electorate is the usual law. This is not true! In fact, the Election Law Guidebook, 1970, shows that in states that use § 23 a base (only 31 do), the people included are not the number eligible to vote, but rather the number that voted in the last election. In addition, the figure next used is 1% of the number that voted in the last election. If this were used for ALA (9300 members voted in 19) then only 93 members would be required to sign a petition to add a name to a ballot. This is substantially what our present Bylaws require (100 signatures are required). This demonstrates that pressure for instant action "clean up" by the committee is based on false advice and lack of research.

The Bylaws committee is responsible to the Executive Board and to the Council. At the Or ientation meeting of JHRT on Sunday, a

work against the approval of this bylaw change. It will be presented to the Council if it is not withdrawn by the Executive Committee. If it passes Council, we urge you to vote NO on 5% at the Membership meeting.

WE
URGE
YOU
TO

ALA Social Responsibilities CONFERENCE Round Table Newsletter

June 29, 1970 No. 7