

# Letter to the Editor

In the recent *LASA Forum* (Summer 2006, issue #3) I detect a welcome engagement with the membership concerning the direction of LASA. It is in this spirit that I wish to respond to President Charles Hale's valuable report. The crux of the message was the decision, unanimously approved at the March 2006 business meeting and supported by 80 percent of the membership in a mailed referendum, to hold the next International Congress in Montreal rather than Boston to accommodate our Cuban colleagues as well as other Latin Americans and to protest U.S. policy which prohibits their attendance.

The focus of much of Charles Hale's message is based on the concern that the Montreal decision may have alienated the 20 percent who voted against the move. This is an understandable reaction of a newly elected president who does not want to see this Congress move result in a painful division within the membership. His ecumenical attempts to represent not only the proponents but the opponents of the move to Montreal left me with a problematic reflection. I don't support the view that the divide among us is between "those who seek spaces of activist and public scholarship, and for those who defend more conventional notions of scholarship as objective, value-free and strictly disengaged from the political conditions that surround us."

I suggest that many of the arguments against the move reflect a conservative cast of mind and should not be seen as representing a neutral, objective defense of an academic association. President Hale's summary of these arguments, which reflect economic, legalistic, dilatory approaches to the role of an academic association, are as value-laden and ideologically driven as the views of the 80

percent who appear to be committed to a more consistently activist and progressive association. I contend that an academic organization always comprises values both collectively as a scholarly association and individually in a member's research, methodology and writing. It is questionable that scholarship avoids taking positions that involve normative judgments. The argument that an academic association should be represented by ostensibly objective, value-free and disengaged research reflects a particular value prism and an ideological persuasion. It should not be given a deeper imprimatur.

Hale writes of receiving 25 pages of text from those opposing the move. He writes "They [their comments] are respectful, well-reasoned and clearly have the best interests of the Association in mind." The summary of the comments that we read center on the extra costs, the faulty planning, the efficacy of the move, Canada as a dubious alternative site and the politicization of the association. Examples of the arguments offered are that Montreal is too expensive, the move should be postponed to 2009 to avoid canceling a contract, the move will have no impact on the Bush administration, not enough members are francophone and "LASA urgently needs to stop its increasing politicization. We are a scholarly organization!"

The move to Montreal, as Charles Hale defends well, is an action that explicitly accepts that an academic association does not live in isolation, but takes stands not only as scholars but also as a collectivity of teachers, students and writers.

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