Obituary Guidelines

These guidelines should be followed when submitting obituaries to the editor. The October and April issues will carry obituaries of members and former members.

Obituaries must be typed, double-spaced, and appropriate for publication without copyediting. Notices should not exceed 300 words in length, unless specially commissioned. Notices to be printed in the October 1983 issue of Perspectives must be received in the editor's office by August 15, 1983.

The constitutionality of the action is not at issue, but to commit the association on a matter of public policy not particularly affecting historians is an abuse of the Council's discretionary powers. At least the current controversy about "intervention" in Poland relates and is limited to the fate of historians whatever one thinks of the issue itself. Even in the far more impassioned days of the war in Vietnam I recall no resolution that the Council endorsed without polling membership. In those days, moreover, the presence of political resolutions on the agenda of the business meeting was usually publicized in advance; an impending notion about a nuclear freeze, by contrast, was not announced in Perspectives or anywhere else to my knowledge.

I am quite happy to leave the ordinary affairs of the association to the elected officers, but when it comes to public issues of a general nature the absent members have a right to be consulted too. Indeed, this is the only way to give resolutions of this kind credibility with public officials, who in any case are increasingly impressed by the gratuitous sounding off of learned societies.

Enno F. Kraether
University of Virginia

Letters

The AHA, I had always thought, was supposed to be apolitical. I was therefore dismayed to see that last December the business meeting adopted, and the Council approved, a resolution favoring a nuclear weapons freeze. Some people might argue, of course, that the issue is so clearcut that it is not actually "political," that it is in fact really moral or perhaps even scholarly in nature, and that the AHA thus has a right to take a stand on the matter. I would like therefore to explain why I think such views are mistaken, and thus why I feel that at the very least the Council should withdraw its support for this resolution and refer it to the membership for a vote.

The first clause asserts that we "as professional historians" warn the public that "all large-scale accumulations of weapons by rival powers have invariably led to the worsening of their relations, and usually to war" (emphasis added). This assertion, however, is palpably false. To take but the most glaring counterexample: the period from the early 1950s to the early 1970s was marked by the greatest accumulation of destructive power by rival states that the world has ever seen.
but relations between America and Russia were clearly better at the end of the period during the years of detente than they were at the height of the Cold War, which ended two decades earlier. So we as a profession association are not merely on record as endorsing a particular interpretation of history, but we have endorsed one that is simply wrong. This in itself should be enough to give us pause.

But even putting that aside, and assuming there is a certain correlation between weapons accumulation and political tension, one cannot infer from that the first causes the second. Those who argue along such lines make the classic error of confusing symptom with cause. The manner in which purely military rivalries affect political relations between states is an empirical question, and not a simple one at that. In some cases, for example, a failure to reassuring may be destabilizing. My point is merely that this is not the kind of question which can be decided by a vote of historians, most of whom are not specialists in this field and thus cannot have studied this issue in any depth.

It follows I think that the resolution is essentially a political document. If there is any doubt about this, the operative part of the resolution (about which few on the Council apparently had misgivings) should clear it up. This part called for negotiated arms reductions, and then for a unilateral American freeze on new nuclear weapons systems. If the Council’s vote for a unilateral freeze is not “political,” then I simply do not know what the term means.

I personally dislike having other people’s politics forced down my throat, and I especially resent the attempts of a political faction—albeit one currently enjoying broad support—to have its views receive the official endorsement of the association as a whole. Even if such views reflected a scholarly consensus, which of course they do not, it would still be inappropriate for the AHA to endorse them officially. Historians as private citizens can support whatever policies they like, but the AHA as a professional association has no business in getting involved with these kinds of issues. I hope therefore that other members will join me in urging the Council to reverse its vote of last December and, if constitutionally it has no greater choice, at least submit resolutions of this sort to a vote of the membership as a whole. Failure to do so, it seems to me, can have but one interpretation. It would mean that the Council is acquiescing in the politicization of the AHA—and indeed, ultimately, in the subverting of those members who cannot stomach the political orientation that it adopted. If that is what the members of the Council want, let them at least say so; but if not—that is, if they have any real interest in maintaining the AHA as a body that can represent the profession as a whole—then I would like to see how their support for this resolution can possibly be defended.

Marc Trachtenberg
University of Pennsylvania

To the Editor:
I mentally applaud as I read your “Publishing Guidelines,” in the January 1983 issue of the AHA Newsletter. May I add, not another guideline, but a plea? The most time-consuming activity that takes place between the receipt of a manuscript by a (conscientious) academic press and a decision on publication is the refereeing. Reading manuscripts for an academic press, added to one’s own teaching and scholarship, is not always enjoyable, frustrating, and always scantily remunerated work. But academic presses and the integrity of every academic discipline are dependent upon the good will of our colleagues, their careful reading and thoughtful reporting on the manuscript they have agreed to review. Although the author of a manuscript under review may find it difficult to believe, the press director or editor is almost as anxious to have the evaluation back in his hands, and a decision reached, as is the author. It is the referee who requires three or more months and variously spaced notes pleading, coaxing, and imploring that cries all our patience. Hence I ask you when a press asks if you will referee a manuscript, please reply promptly in order that the manuscript can be immediately dispatched to you, or another reader, should you be unable to accept it. I have made a further request of readers who have been kind enough to accept the assignment to return the manuscript and comments within the allotted time, or inform the editor in writing of your inability to do so.

Bernard M. Goldman, Director
Wayne State University Press

Historical Journals Conference

In December 1982, the AHA annual meeting, a number of editors of historical journals formed the Conference of Historical Journals. They felt that they needed a formal organization through which to discuss, evaluate, or express concerns and views of common interest. Among the items on the conference’s initial substantive agenda will be the exploration of technological innovations capable of enhancing the editorial, promotional, and production capacities of members; the possible establishment of a formal means to alert members to particular problems, e.g., multiple submissions, analyzing the benefits of cooperation in the areas of advertising, subscriptions, fulfillment, etc.; and mutual agreement on guidelines and standards for submissions, consideration, fees, page charges, and so on.

Marc Trachtenberg
University of Pennsylvania

Research & Publications

Labor History Society


Papers will be read on the lessons of contemporary labor history, the labor history of the United States, and the history of trade unions.

The conference will be held in Baltimore, Maryland, March 27-29, 1983. The annual meeting will be held on March 28, 1983.

New York University

The editor of Social Studies will soon be observing vol. 88, the first volume of the periodical, and will be the first to review it. The periodical is issued in a manner that is both interesting and effective.

The editors of Social Studies are T. Sai

meeting is being held next month, and the present conference is the 6th Annual Conference, 17th Century Workshop. Education and History.