

July 13, 2009

Paul LeClerc, President
New York Public Library
476 Fifth Avenue, Room 213
New York, NY 10018-2788

Dear Mr. LeClerc,

I write to you as President of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies. The AAASS, a nonprofit, non-political, scholarly society, is the leading private organization in the world dedicated to the advancement of knowledge about the former Soviet Union (including Eurasia) and Eastern and Central Europe. The AAASS supports teaching, research, and publication relating to the peoples and territories within this area.

On behalf of our members, I would like to protest the NYPL's decision to close the Slavic and Baltic Division Reading Room and to eliminate staff support for one of the most important collections of Slavic research materials in the United States and the world.

Our deep concern about this closure stems from the fact that the NYPL's Slavic and Baltic Division Reading Room has long served us as an important center for scholarship and study, a site where scholars have access to librarians specialized in our regional area of expertise as well as important reference materials and finding aids. Many AAASS members have worked in the reading room and know the great value of its collections and staff. In addition, large numbers of foreign scholars as well as members of the large immigrant communities in the New York Metropolitan area have made extensive use of the room precisely because of the academic materials, references, and specialized consultation it offers.

Since the Division's reading room was closed in September 2008, without, we gather, any public discussion, we have heard repeatedly from members about problems in locating books in Slavic languages, about noisy and crowded working conditions in a reading room overflowing with students and tourists, and about restricted and delayed access to rare books. In addition, we are extremely concerned about the future development of the collection without a qualified Slavic librarian – as you well know, great libraries cannot long survive by relying on

collections amassed in the past and neglected thereafter, without further acquisitions and expert oversight. This situation is unacceptable to the scholarly community that we represent and we believe it is unworthy of The New York Public Library's long tradition of leadership in Slavic studies.

We realize that your budget is strained under current economic circumstances, but we urge you to do everything in your power to find a solution to this problem. At the very least, we hope you will commit the library to hiring a Slavic librarian, thereby ensuring that NYPL remains a center of Slavic research in the twenty-first century. Doing so supports the NYPL's core mission of providing scholars as well as the general public access to its collections, research services, and reading rooms.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely yours,

William Taubman
President