Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its October 2009 meeting.]

THE COUNCIL MET ON 15–16 MAY 2009 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. PRESIDENT Catherine Porter presided. The officers present were First Vice President Sidonie Smith, Second Vice President Russell A. Berman, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Carlos J. Alonso, Charles Altieri, Sara Scott Armengot, Dorian F. Bell, Jennifer Crewe, Anne Ruggles Gere, Jane Harper, Francis Abiola Irele, George Levine, Paula Rabinowitz, Lynne Tatlock, Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, and Kathleen Woodward. Executive Council member Karin C. Ryding was absent. The MLA staff members present were Director of Operations Terrence Callaghan, Director of Bibliographic Information Services and Editor of the *MLA International Bibliography* Barbara Chen, Director of Programs and ADFL Nelly Furman, Managing Editor of MLA Publications and Director of Publishing Operations Judy Goulding, Director of Financial Operations Amilde Hadden, Director of Convention Programs Maribeth T. Kraus, Director of Research and ADE David Laurence, Director of Book Publications David G. Nicholls, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Carol Zuses.

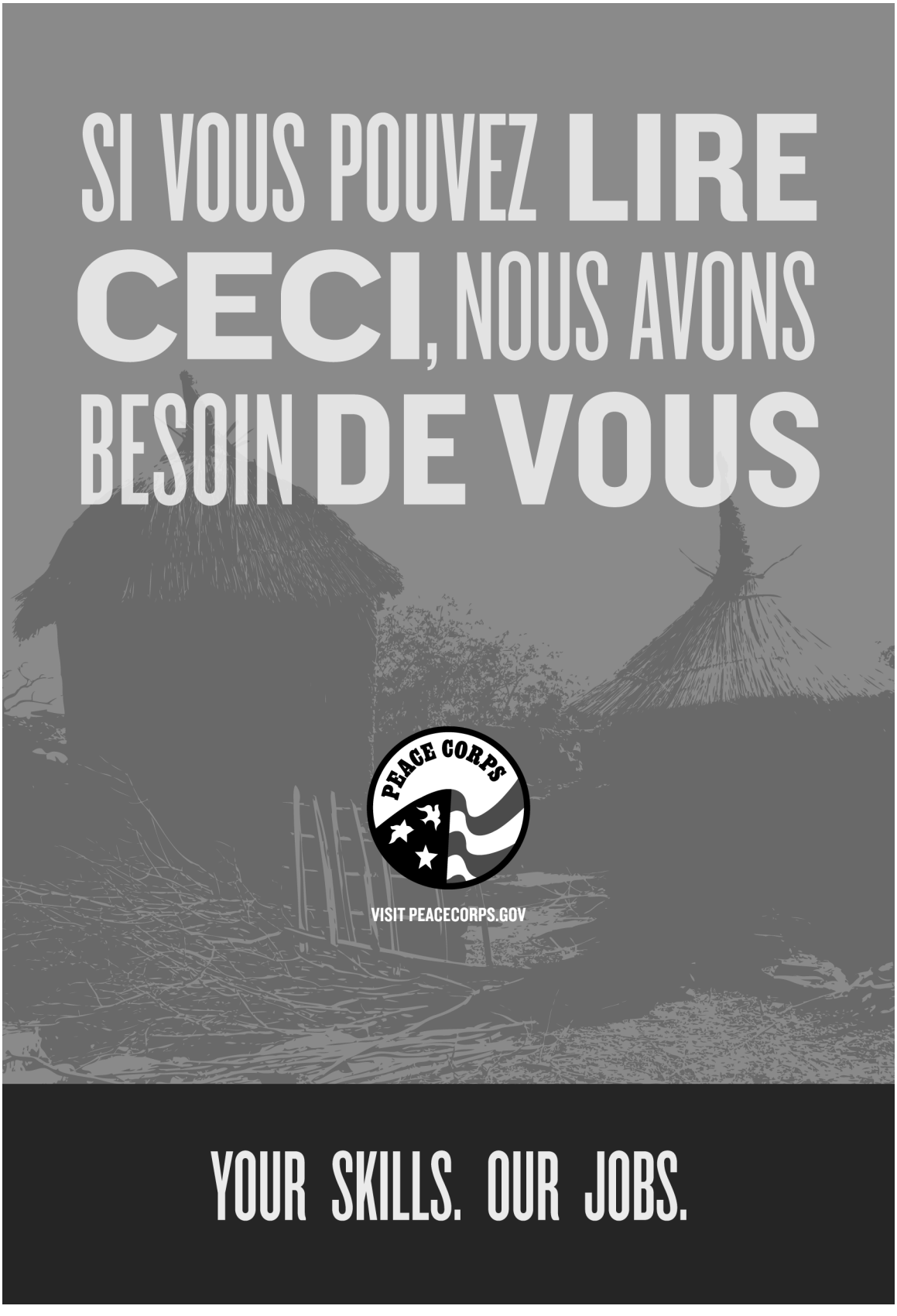
On the morning of 15 May, the council convened in regular session to begin working through the reports and action items on its agenda. After lunch, the council again convened in regular session to continue working through its agenda. The council's agenda for the day included time for intensive discussions of two topics: ways to follow up on the association's recent initiatives on workforce issues and the council's involvement in strategic planning. On 16 May, the council convened first in executive session for the annual review of the policy documents that pertain to the MLA staff and the working environment at the MLA headquarters office and for the annual review of the executive director. Following the executive session, the council convened in regular session to complete work on its agenda. The council adjourned at 12:50 p.m., having concluded all the business before it.

The council took the following actions:

1. *Administration and Finance.* The Finance Committee presented a midyear report on finances with a summary of association income and expenses in the fiscal year 2008–09 after seven months. The committee projected a deficit in the association's unrestricted fund that was larger than the deficit projected in October 2008. The increased deficit was attributed to lower revenue in certain budget categories (e.g., annual convention, Job Information Service). Both the committee and council members noted that the national economic crisis and budget cuts in states, schools, and libraries were likely to have an

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effect on the MLA budget, but it was still too early in the budget year to know exactly what the effect would be.

The Finance Committee also presented to the council a tentative budget for the fiscal year 2009–10 that projected a deficit of $158,340 in the association's unrestricted fund. The deficit was attributed to a projected decline in revenue that was not quite matched by reductions in expenses. After completing its review of the tentative budget for the fiscal year 2009–10, the council voted to approve it.

Finally, the council designated Eisner LLP to conduct the audit of the association's fiscal year 2008–09 accounts.

2. *Request concerning the September (Directory) Issue of* PMLA. The council received a report from the staff Finance Committee that detailed the increasing costs associated with printing and mailing the September (Directory) issue of *PMLA*. The committee noted that much of the material in the Directory is now available at the MLA Web site and that the rest could be migrated online. Because of this duplication, the committee asked the council to consider discontinuing the print publication of the Directory issue after 2009. The council discussed the advantages (e.g., reduced environmental impact, monetary savings, ability to delete information as soon as it becomes obsolete) and disadvantages (e.g., loss of a browsable print reference, loss of advertising revenue for the issue) and decided to approve the request to discontinue printing the September (Directory) issue of *PMLA* after 2009. The council also authorized the staff to develop a plan for publishing an annual printed list of members (with e-mail addresses) that members could purchase.

3. *Approval of the February 2009 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its February 2009 meeting for publication in the October 2009 issue of *PMLA*.

4. *Confirmation of an Action Taken between Council Meetings.* In March, council members learned that the Board of Regents of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) had voted to abolish tenure for all future faculty hires in the system. President Catherine Porter drafted a statement deploring this decision, and the council was asked to approve the statement and agree to send it to the KCTCS Board of Regents and publish it at the MLA Web site. The council's procedure for making decisions between council meetings (see Jan. 2005 *PMLA* 278) was implemented, and the full council was given the opportunity to discuss the matter on the council's electronic discussion list. Since all council members approved both actions, it was not necessary to ask the council's advisory committee to make the decision. At the present meeting, the council confirmed the decision it made using its electronic discussion list.

5. *Letter in Support of Louisiana State University Press.* The council authorized the president to write a letter to the governor of Louisiana asking for the restoration of funding to the Louisiana State University Press.

6. *Letter Commending St. John's University.* The council authorized the president to write a letter to St. John's University, New York, commending the university for converting to the tenure track the positions held by several non-tenure-track instructors in the university's composition program.

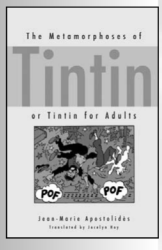
7. *Initial Appointments to the Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession.* Having established and charged the seven-member Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession in February (see Oct. 2009 *PMLA* 1902), the council made initial committee appointments at the present meeting. The five appointees to committee seats reserved for faculty members holding non-tenure-track appointments were chosen from among the members who used a Web-based self-nomination form to signal their interest in serving on the committee. The appointees to the other two seats, one reserved for a department chair and the other for a writing program or language center director, were selected from other lists of suggestions. The council appointed the following members to the committee: Sandra K. Baringer, Univ. of California, Riverside; Janet Galligani Casey, Skidmore Coll.; Cary DiPietro, Univ. of Toronto, Mississauga; Douglas Hesse, Univ. of Denver; Elizabeth Landers, Univ. of Missouri, Saint Louis; Nicolas Shumway, Univ. of Texas, Austin; and Emma Widener, Univ. of New Haven. To establish a rotation of committee members, the council appointed Casey, DiPietro, and Widener to two-year terms and Baringer, Hesse, Landers, and Shumway to three-year terms. The council asked Jane Harper to serve ex officio as its liaison to the committee and noted that she could also represent the concerns of those who teach in two-year colleges.

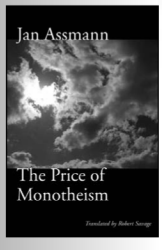
8. *Request from the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities (CAFPRR).* After the committee's March meeting, during which it carried out its charge to review and update the MLA's recommendation on minimum per-course compensation for part-time faculty members, the members of the committee wrote to the council to express their concerns about the basis for the calculation used to arrive at the recommended compensation figure. The council discussed the committee's concerns and decided to ask the new Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession for its advice on the issues that CAFPRR raised.

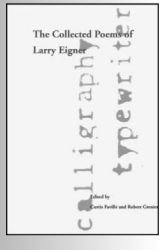
9. *Recommendation from the Committee on Honors and Awards (CHA).* The CHA recommended that the MLA Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement be awarded every two years instead of every three. This recommendation was based on the CHA's belief that there are too many potential award recipients to limit the award to a triennial occasion. The staff noted that having a biennial cycle for the scholarly-achievement award would recreate the periodic overlap with the triennial cycle for the Phyllis Franklin Award that the council had recently taken steps to avoid (see Jan. 2008 *PMLA* 264). After considering several possible adjustments to both awards, the council decided to retain the triennial cycle for the MLA Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement.

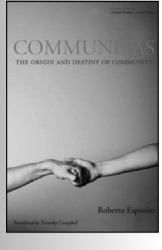
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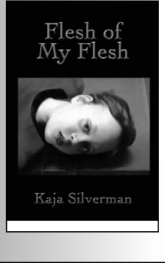












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10. *Request from the Division on American Indian Literatures.* The executive committee of the Division on American Indian Literatures requested the council's authorization to establish an award in the field of American Indian literary studies that the executive committee would administer. The council did not approve this request for a division-sponsored prize but expressed interest in pursuing the possibility of establishing an association prize in this field of study. The council therefore decided to ask the Committee on Honors and Awards for advice on how to proceed and instructed the staff to transmit to the CHA the council's specific questions about the frequency of such a prize and how the field of study to be recognized by the prize should be defined.

During the discussion of this request, a council member expressed concern that a book may be submitted for only one prize competition. The author or publisher of a book in a specialized field of study may not enter both the competition for a specialized prize and the competition for either the Lowell Prize or the MLA Prize for a First Book. Thus, the latter two prizes tend to recognize books in the mainstream fields of British and American literature. The council asked the CHA to consider whether specialized books should be allowed to enter two prize competitions.

11. *Recommendations from the Program Committee.* The council received and acted on the Program Committee's recommendations regarding allied and affiliate organizations, divisions, and discussion groups. The council renewed for seven years the allied organization status of six societies: International Brecht Society, International Courtly Literature Society, Marxist Literary Group, MELUS, Melville Society, and Society for the Study of Early Modern Women. In two cases, the council authorized the committee to transmit specific concerns to be addressed during the organizations' next reviews. The International Brecht Society and the International Courtly Literature Society will be asked to involve a wider variety of speakers in their sessions and to develop collaborative sessions with other groups under the new convention structure that will go into effect for the January 2011 convention. The Association for the Study of Dada and Surrealism and the Henry James Society, whose reviews had been deferred for one year (see Jan. 2009 *PMLA* 304), were renewed for the stipulated six years. The Kafka Society of America, whose review was deferred from 2008 to allow the society to respond to additional questions from the Program Committee, was suspended. The information provided by the society was not adequate, and the society's decreasing membership numbers raised doubts about its viability.

In actions relating to divisions and discussion groups, the council did not approve a request for a name change from the Division on English Literature Other Than British and American. The proposed new name did not properly convey the focus of the division. The council granted division status to the Discussion Group on Arabic Literature and Culture and granted permanent status to the Discussion Group on Travel Literature. The council did not grant division status to the Discussion Group on Law as Literature and authorized the staff to transmit to the group the Program Committee's advice concerning a revised petition. The council approved a petition for a discussion group on comics and graphic narratives. The new discussion group will organize its first session for the January 2011 convention. The council did not approve a petition for a discussion group on Spanish in the United States and authorized the Program Committee to postpone consideration of a petition for a discussion group on libraries and academia until the committee's fall meeting.

Finally, the Program Committee recommended that, beginning in 2010, discussion groups use the same procedures as divisions for their executive committee elections. This change would mean that discussion groups would not have to set aside time for an election during their sessions at the convention and that all discussion group members, not just those who attend a group's convention session, would be able to vote. The nomination process would also be more open to suggestions from the membership. The council approved the proposed change in the election process for discussion group executive committees.

12. *Council Meeting Schedule.* The council approved the following dates for its meetings in 2012: 24–25 February, 18–19 May, and 26–27 October.

13. *Committee Appointments.* The council made two additional committee appointments. The names of the new committee members appear in the listings of MLA committee members in the September 2009 (Directory) issue of *PMLA* and at the MLA Web site.

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