

Publishing Programs and Library Interests: A Symposium

THE FOLLOWING two papers were presented at the meeting of the Conference of Eastern College Librarians, November 24, 1951, at Columbia University.

By DATUS C. SMITH, JR

University Press and University Library

Mr. Smith is director of Princeton University Press and former president of the Association of American University Presses.

OUR FRIENDS in the Soviet Union have a tendency to confuse the stated objective with the accomplished fact, announcing, for instance, that Comrade Stalin has ordered steel production increased by 17½ per cent, and henceforth acting as if the improvement had been achieved. Much of what I have to say here is concerned with objectives, and so I would like to state that people in university press work try to avoid the Soviet error. We do not confuse recognition of a goal with the attainment of it. We know how very much ground we have to cover before we can look at the institution of the university press with the satisfaction, for instance, with which we look at the institution of the university library.

But if a university press and a university library do not feel that they are serving in a common cause, there is something terribly wrong with one or the other—and I would guess it is not the library that is at fault. The library, through the decades, has been thoughtfully adapted to the service of its university, whereas the press is a relatively new institution.

But whether or not the performance is perfect on either side, the press and the library are similar. Each is a specialized instrument for the conservation and dissemination of knowledge—in other words, for putting knowledge to work. Librarians have heard the changes rung on this theme so often that they

need call in no outsider to tell them what their business is. But it is possible that they have not thought of all the similarities and dissimilarities of their work with that of a university press. Some of you know the inspiring little statement of my colleague Julian Boyd in which he gave the staff of the Firestone Library his conception of the librarian's triple obligation, to the past, the present, and the future. With only minor change, the same principles would serve as an excellent guide for a university press.

There are differences, of course. For one thing, the library strives to be comprehensive and boundlessly catholic, while the press must of necessity concentrate on a relatively small number of titles. For another, the library is intensively used by scholars on its own campus and it is only to a very limited degree—by such devices as interlibrary loans and hospitality to visiting scholars—that the materials of the library serve users off the campus; the business of the press, on the contrary, is the projection of scholarly work around the world.

And one final difference, which is wistfully noted by scholarly publishers: because a press wears some of the aspects of a business organization, and has in its account books an item called "sales income" there is an expectation among some university administrators that the press will balance its expense by the money taken in at the sales window, and to express aggrieved surprise on discovering that this is usually impossible. Yet I have never yet heard an administrator refer to a library ap-

propriation as a "loss," or to expect the income from book fines to balance the cost of a year's operations.

But whatever the differences, the ultimate objectives of the two institutions are similar, so I hope college librarians may be interested in some special aspects of scholarly publishing.

1. *Geographical Distribution.* One of the things wrong with American cultural life is Eastern Seaboardism, and—its most virulent form—Manhattan-Islandism. Far too much power, for the public good, is exercised by this particular section of the country—in radio, television, magazines, newspapers, the theater, and book publishing. As a former westerner I view with agitated concern the news that nationwide television is now possible. That is in part a result of my estimate of the intellectual and esthetic standards of the broadcasting industry. But even in book publishing, the East, and specifically New York, has too dominant a part. Of the 94 members of the American Book Publishers Council, only 16 aside from university presses have non-New York addresses, and only a very few of those 16 are among the larger and more influential of U.S. book publishers. That is not right. This is a fine city which shows considerable promise, but I do not think the New York point of view is the only valid point of view. It is a matter of satisfaction, therefore, that the strong university presses are widely distributed. You will find well established and active presses in Chapel Hill, Norman, Baton Rouge, Chicago, Ames, Minneapolis, Palo Alto, and Berkeley, and a dozen or more younger and smaller presses, full of ginger and coming on fast, at other universities in the West and South. We easterners sometimes talk as if we had all the answers—political, intellectual, spiritual—but we know we really haven't. The variety of points of view presented by the nation's university presses seems especially useful.

2. *Competition in Excellence.* Only in the most trivial ways and on the rarest occasions are university presses competitive with each other except in a striving for excellence. You will find among the presses the most open-handed cooperation, including a sharing of all the information that, in other fields, would be put in the category of trade secrets. There are many ways, including some of great interest to librarians, in which the university

presses have not even begun to practice co-operation; but that will come in time and what we chiefly lack is the detailed plan, not the will to make it work. Nor is there real competition with commercial publishing or with other forms of scholarly communication. Microfilm, microcard, and microprint, interlibrary loan of typewritten manuscripts, the activities of the Government Printing Office, expansion of facilities for journal publication, the work of specialized publishers such as Ralph Shaw's Scarecrow Press, the scholarly publishing that trade houses still have the temerity or magnanimity to engage in on occasion—all of these must be welcomed and applauded by the university press. There is a colossal job of scholarly communication to do in the world and no one agency can do it all.

3. *Common Problem.* And that leads to the fact that the universities which support university presses are shouldering a burden common to all. Although the remark would probably come with better grace from someone else, I must observe that the universities with research programs but no publishing agency are not pulling their weight in the boat. They are producing research but asking others to bear all or some of the cost of publishing it. I do not think the answer must be a multiplication of university presses—indeed, the economic problems of the very small university press are so difficult that a new press should be founded only after the most careful consideration. But if a university elects, perhaps wisely, not to have a press, then I think it has a high obligation to provide funds to aid publication of its research elsewhere; or, at the least, not to take on new research projects without looking through to the last stage of the research process—publication. Particular projects may well be self-supporting in the publishing phase, but we know that in general and across the board scholarly publishing can be carried on at present only at a cost to the institution sponsoring the press. At Princeton our press has a printing plant which makes a profit, and that profit is in effect a subsidy for publishing scholarly books, so the University itself is under no direct cost. But our book publishing considered by itself is carried on at a really substantial loss, and most universities maintaining presses have an annual appropriation

for the press in their budgets running to many thousands of dollars.

In the case of my own press, only about one-third of the books we publish have Princeton connections, and I think somewhat the same situation obtains at most of the older university presses. That means that the universities maintaining presses are subsidizing the research of the universities without presses. I realize that the above remarks should be addressed to college presidents, deans, and boards of trustees, rather than to the blameless librarians. But I would hope that librarians might bear these facts in the back of their minds someday when they find themselves being irritated by some short-coming of a university press.

4. *Professional Development.* The professional status of a librarian has not, I understand, always been recognized. Time was—certainly through much of the nineteenth century—when a faculty member too dull for teaching and too indolent for research was regarded as just the man for college librarian. Conditions, let me observe, have changed. But as the profession of librarianship developed, the danger was that the mastery of techniques would drive out the qualities of imagination and intellectual breadth that we think a librarian must have. Librarians are probably unsatisfied that a proper balance has yet been achieved, and in my field, I am certainly aware that university presses still have a long distance to travel. But there is now, I am happy to say, a considerable number of people at many universities who regard scholarly publishing as an honorable profession, and—for them—the most interesting one in the world. A university press job is no longer merely a way station on the road to New York. For a really impressive number of university press people nowadays, scholarship is their business, and they like it. Incidentally, faculty status for top personnel is coming to be the rule rather than the exception.

5. *Public Support.* We are all familiar with the increasing dependence of universities upon public support. There are ideological considerations here which I do not wish to go into, but the reader might be interested in noting that the really tremendous increase in the sale of university press books in the last two decades has been in effect a means

of gaining wide public financial support for scholarly publishing. Distasteful as the present high cost of books is to both librarians and publishers, it is a fact that a great widening of the sales base has made it possible to hold the increase in the selling price of scholarly books to a fraction of the increase we meet in the case of almost every other form of merchandise. We like to think that the more alert, forward-looking, and imaginative approach toward publishing on the part of university press people has been a contribution toward this result, though we know it is not the only one because the trade publishers, also, may boast of a relatively small increase in book prices, in comparison with other commodities.

Incidentally, a special aspect of the recent sales record is of great interest to me and I think may be to librarians also. That is the matter of foreign sales, a question that American book publishers have rather slighted in the past chiefly because export has been a good way to lose your shirt. But whether one's approach is that of power politics in a hard-boiled world or a belief in the ultimate achievement of the brotherhood of man, I am sure librarians will agree that to make American scholarship available to people in other cultures and other nations is of high importance. It may be of interest to know, therefore, that sales of Princeton books to foreign countries, which amounted to about \$2500 per year before the war, will this year probably be in the neighborhood of \$75,000—and that is exclusive of purchases made in this country for foreign use such as the U.S. Information Centers of the Department of State and purchases under Public Law 265, the so-called Finnish Book Bill, and of course is exclusive of donations such as to the U.S. Book Exchange. This sensational expansion—almost thirty-fold—in the export of our books reflects no special credit on us, but is merely another evidence of the way in which the intellectual center of gravity of the world has shifted somewhat toward the United States in the last two decades—in part because of fascist persecution in the old world, in part as a by-product of American material wealth and power.

6. *The Long View.* Nothing that I have said about university presses is important in comparison with the statement that they must

have the long view. If they do not take the long view, not only will they fail to serve their universities and the interests of scholarship, but I am convinced that they will perish economically. For most scholarly books—not for textbooks and not for a few other special types—a university press is the ideal publisher, and can come closer than any other kind of publisher to achieving the maximum world-wide distribution. But if the university publisher gets himself confused with Simon & Schuster, publishing books that are of the S & S type though not quite good enough to make the grade with them, he is abdicating his unique position of advantage and asking the world to judge him according to standards which will do him no good. And furthermore, of course, he is loafing on his main job. I can report a secret: even from the strictly economic point of view, the books of highest scholarship are the best books for a university press to publish. There are plenty of scholarly books which can command an audience of 10,000, 25,000 or sometimes quite a bit more, and these books often make money. But the real bread and butter of a university press list is the solid work, indispensable to scholars in the field, that sells perhaps 3000 to 5000 copies and sells steadily,

year after year. It is these substantial works, not the would-be flashy titles (which might be called "second-best sellers") that help to pay the heavy cost of publishing books selling perhaps 500 to 1500 copies and that can be counted upon with assurance to produce a loss. To give some detail on this from the publishing list, with which I am most familiar: a study of our sales in a recent year indicated, that 70% of our sales income in that year came from titles published in earlier years; 15 of our 25 largest income-producers were more than one year old.

It will be clear from this that I take an astonishingly optimistic view, holding that economic self-interest, far from being a temptation to sin, is in this case actually an incentive to virtue.

My concluding remark is completely unnecessary here, but I would like to have the pleasure of making it anyway: the common interest of library and press is in no way more striking than in their concern with the freedom of ideas. Everything that they stand for, and most especially their determination to take the long view, is destroyed if ideas are not free. Even if libraries and presses shared no other interest, their dedication to that principle would bring them together.

By THEODORE WALLER

Problems of American Book Publishers

Mr. Waller is managing director, American Book Publishers Council.

EARLY IN 1950, a group of leading American publishers began a series of meetings to assess the outlook for books and book publishing. All publishers were feeling the impact of economic and cultural changes which threatened the industry in a variety of ways. It seemed important to identify these phenomena and take steps to adapt to them. Extended discussions brought out a number of discouraging findings. In the first place, original publishers of serious books were experiencing economic pressures that threatened to reduce their margin for literary speculation almost to the vanishing point. It is within this margin that the trade publisher must consider the

promising work of unknown authors, the experimental and the scholarly work. None of these is likely to attract a large audience, yet each may be an important book. Once the margin of literary speculation is seriously diminished, one of the most creative and socially useful aspects of book publishing is gone. Publishers are reluctant to lose the flexibility within which they can afford to gamble on uncertain literary property, for such a loss not only reduces the social value of publishing but takes the excitement and joy out of it.

Among the contributing factors the publishers noted were: intensified competition of the mass media; increased dependence on subsidiary rights; intra-industry price competition; the rising break-even point; the declining life expectancy of the general book; the crisis

in the retail book trade; the impact of inflation on library budgets and on school book buying; the flight from writing as a career and the creeping paralysis of conformity.

No one can be sure of the extent to which television and the "slick" magazines are diverting time and attention from book reading. It seems clear that if all the television sets in the country were to become inoperable tomorrow, the problems of publishing would remain. But surely there is significance in the shift throughout our culture toward the mass-produced, widely-distributed, easily-assimilated product for leisure time use. On Broadway, no more than half the legitimate theatres that were flourishing twenty years ago are still in business and the "road" is withering. In the magazine field, we have seen the virtual disappearance of the "little" magazine as a serious literary phenomenon. During the last generation, book publishing has been characterized by the growth and great financial success of the book clubs and by the development of the inexpensive paper-bound reprint. Paper-bound reprints and book clubs have undoubtedly brought good reading within the reach of millions who had previously been either too poor or too remote or both to obtain books. The reprints and the clubs have made a superb contribution to enlightenment. Some observers are apprehensive, however, that reprints and book clubs threaten to reduce the chances for publication of books with a small market potential.

So it is with subsidiary rights. No publisher disdains supplementary income from the sale of reprint, book club and film rights, and rights for other secondary uses. It is only when this subsidiary income begins to dominate the economy of publishing that it becomes a threat. This dominance looms on the horizon because book prices have by no means kept pace with the costs of publishing and of book manufacturing. Thus, were it not for subsidiary income, many publishers would find it impossible to stay in business. As every year brings an increasing dependence on income of this sort, editors find themselves considering manuscripts not alone on their merits and not alone in terms of their normal market as hard-bound books but in terms of the extent to which they fit the requirements of the paper-bound reprinter's larger market. The whole character of publishing changes when

these considerations intrude on editorial judgment.

It may be proposed that the publisher free himself of his dependence on subsidiary income by increasing his prices. The law of diminishing returns entirely aside, however, here again the publisher finds himself trapped by forces beyond his control. His original book must compete with bargain-priced book club selections and with inexpensive reprints. This competition holds book prices down. Another factor of the same character is the advancing break-even point. One leading publisher says that ten years ago he could expect to get his investment back if a book sold from two to three thousand copies and that for most general books the figure is now six thousand.

Like all producers, the publisher has an abiding dependence on his retail outlets. No industry in the country is confronted with so many marginally efficient and marginally profitable retailers as book publishing. Last year there were many more book store failures than openings. Government figures demonstrate that no other group of retailers in the country have profit margins so low as the bookseller. Publishers know that the industry cannot survive if the principal distribution channel for its product fails.

Even as the retail book trade struggles for its life, library budgets are contracted by inflationary pressures. Publishers are increasingly aware of the importance of that hard core of library purchasers which spells the difference between success and failure for many books. Book budgets, however, have by no means kept pace with rising costs; library acquisitions practice has had to be modified accordingly.

What is true in the publishing, lending and selling of books is true too in the writing of books. The publisher is confronted by an exodus from the profession of writing. Serious writing is increasingly an avocation; to be a vocation, writing must be less serious. Except for that rare, tax-ridden specimen, the man of independent means, the professional man of letters must with fewer and fewer exceptions turn elsewhere for his livelihood.

Finally, and perhaps most serious, in reviewing the state of their business 18 months ago, the leading American publishers took note of the new and militant orthodoxy which in-

explicitly and corrosively diminishes the freedom to publish, write, sell and lend honest and honestly controversial books. To impose conformity on books is to deny the very basis of a free society by eliminating choice. If the hearts of authors and editors shrivel under the threat of denunciation, the objectives of book-burning are achieved with an efficiency and economy beyond the dreams of Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin.

Having surveyed this rather dismal landscape, American publishers working through the American Book Publishers Council created the Committee on Reading Development. The purpose of the Committee is to explore the possibilities of increasing interest in books and awareness of their essential role in our society, to study the threat to them from competing media and to see that by conscious co-ordinated effort the groundwork can be laid for developments which might over a long period of time increase the health and importance of the publishing industry. The Committee's first goal was to stimulate increased cohesion within the book world; to develop a climate in which authors, publishers, librarians, booksellers, book manufacturers and book-minded educators might work together with mutual confidence toward common goals.

The Committee initially gave close attention to the establishment of a working collaboration with the library profession, notably through the American Library Association. The ALA last year established a Committee on Relations with Publishers as its vehicle for working with the CRD. The two committees meet several times a year and the result is a joint publisher-librarian clearing-house. In the last year and a half, through this joint group, publishers and librarians have collaborated on many matters of mutual concern. Plans for support of legislation for federal aid to state library commissions have been discussed and implemented. An experimental program of combined book exhibits to be made available at regional and state library meetings has been launched. Individual publishers have been encouraged to expedite delivery of deposit copies to the Library of Congress and to carry Library of Congress catalog card numbers in their books. Threats to our traditional freedom to publish, sell and loan all kinds of books have been identified

and reports on methods of dealing with them have been exchanged.

The recent postal rate legislation which raised nearly all rates except the book rate affords a spectacular example of the success which can accrue through collaborative effort among groups with an identical interest. I am confident that this pattern of cooperation can be repeated, both on legislative matters and in areas where the results will be less dramatic but nonetheless valuable. The keystone, of course, must be mutuality of interest. Our experience with the joint publisher-librarian group indicates that mutuality of interest exists in a number of areas which are of great importance to both groups.

Another major area of the Committee on Reading Development's activity has been the encouragement of basic research on reading habits. In an effort to focus competent attention on this subject, the Committee arranged a conference on reading development held last January. An account of the conference was published in *Publishers' Weekly* for April 28, 1951 and Lester Asheim's report of the meeting appeared in the summer issue of *Public Opinion Quarterly*. The work of the communications experts and publishers who came together to discuss what is known about reading habits and define the areas for future exploration has provided a foundation for a number of projected studies which should prove extremely valuable to all who have an interest in book use.

In cooperation with the library profession, the national farm organizations, and the CRD, the Extension Service of the United States Department of Agriculture in September held a two-day Conference on Rural Reading which brought together some 100 participants. What farm families read, what they would like to read, where they get books, and how they can get improved access to books were among the topics discussed. A number of state and possibly county conferences on rural reading are expected to be held by state and local organizations as an outcome of the national conference. In addition, a handbook for librarians, extension workers, teachers, and other rural leaders interested in promoting book use will be published next year in inexpensive paper-bound form suitable for wide distribution.

While the Committee is forced to concen-

223

trate its limited resources on a comparatively few projects, it is eager to place on its agenda for consideration all the meritorious proposals, from whatever source, that come to it. We regard the library profession as

a talented and vigorous ally in the promotion of reading, and look to you both as a source of suggestions and as invaluable aides in the evaluation of proposals that come before us.

Brief of the Minutes of the Meetings of the ACRL Board of Directors

Meeting, January 29, 1952, at Chicago

Present were officers and directors, section and committee chairmen, ACRL representatives on ALA Council, and several invited guests.

President Ellsworth opened the meeting by calling for committee reports. Mr. Swank mentioned briefly the need for information on audio-visual equipment in colleges and urged support of the questionnaire being sent out by the Committee on Audio-Visual Work to some two thousand institutions. Mr. Muller reported recent articles in *College and Research Libraries* covering building plans and the buildings conference to be held in Columbus in April. This conference needed the help of several consultants if it was to carry on successfully the work of the former Cooperative Committee on Library Buildings. Mr. Muller spoke briefly on the practice of recommending building consultants to institutions with building problems. He felt his list of consultants was getting out of date and was not sure to what extent recommendations led to actual hiring of consultants.

Mr. Swank reported as past chairman of the Committee on Constitution and By-Laws that, as things stood, his committee held an undesirable veto power over proposed legislation. The committee therefore recommended the Constitution be amended (as voted below). It was understood that once this action became final the committee would prepare legislation upon instruction of the Board of Directors.

The motion was passed unanimously that, the Committee on Constitution and By-Laws be instructed to prepare a written recommendation proposing the deletion of the phrase

"upon a written recommendation of the Committee on Constitution and By-Laws appointed by the president" from Article IX and Article X of the ACRL Constitution to be submitted to a vote of the members of the association.

As chairman of the Committee on Administrative Procedures Mr. Parker reported the serious budget situation facing many college libraries, and requested instruction as to whether his group should attempt to "pressure" institutions whose library standards were hopelessly inadequate. President Ellsworth requested a recommendation from the committee on this point.

In the absence of Miss Wixie Parker, Mr. Hamlin reported that she was well started in managing the Duplicates Exchange Union of ACRL.

Miss Herrick summarized the activities of the Committee on Financing *College and Research Libraries*, which was now attempting to focus its influence on a few places likely to produce advertisements for the journal. Mr. Hamlin said that eight pages of advertising were expected for the April issue and described promotional material prepared in his office.

Mr. Reid summarized the final report of the Committee to Study Materials for Instruction in the Use of the Library, which is now available at the headquarters office. Mr. Reid recommended that a promotional film should be prepared to sell the library to the students, and this was referred to the present chairman, Mr. Wyman Parker. (It is unlikely that ACRL will be able to produce a film. The committee will probably be eliminated, on joint recommendation of past