



The Association of American University Presses, Inc.
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AAUP ANNUAL MEETING, JUNE 1979

Address by J.G. Goellner, Director
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When I became the press director at Johns Hopkins in 1974, it seemed to me that it would be a good idea if I would not accept any office in the AAUP for about five years. I knew I would need at least that much time to try to figure out how to run a university press. Though I am not at all sure that I've figured it out yet, time is up. My five year grace period, I note, expires in just four days. So now I guess I am supposed to try to help figure out how to run a university press association. I am deeply honored by your vote of confidence, but please note that I carefully refrain from thanking you for the high honor of standing downfield on the firing range. I will talk about that a year from now.

Meanwhile, I do promise to give the job my best shot. Custom seems to require at this point that I share a few thoughts with you. I am glad to do that. I think you have a right to know what I think, and I know very well that many of you think otherwise, and that's okay because, willy nilly, the ancient Chinese curse is sure to be visited upon us and we shall live in interesting times.

By way of preparation, I went into the archives and I reread the talks given by my predecessors as they stood, a different one each year, at this same podium. And in reading those texts I was impressed, not only by the graceful wit, but even more by the uniformity of high purpose; and I tell you that dreams have been dreamed by the presidents of AAUP, old and imaginative dreams that if somehow could all have been enacted in the waking world, would today have our Association operating at levels of achievement that in the waking world remain as elusive as ever.

Our executive director, in his report given at the business meeting, called the roll of progress made by the Association in the past twenty years. I would not denigrate one bit of what has been reported, but I submit that the achievement of the association, however proud of it we may be, and we are proud of it and should be, has not been nearly so large as it might have been. And I've pondered on why this should be so, because the kind of achievement I speak of may be elusive but it is not illusory, and I think I can identify two reasons. The first is that most of the moves made by the Association in the past two decades, whether ahead or laterally or sometimes backward, have

been essentially reactive moves made in response to circumstances, threats, opportunities, originating outside the Association itself or to needs expressed by individual presses. Now there is nothing wrong with being reactive as far as it goes, but we surely have not been as forceful as we might have been in creating our own initiatives. Working as we do in academic environments, we tend to talk a lot, don't we, as if debate were the only nourishment for new ideas. I, for one, find it refreshing when a guy like Ed King gets an idea for a new promotional and bibliographic enterprise, and, I guess, impatient with everlasting debate, thinks it through and then acts on it. I want to say right on, Ed; we all benefit from your initiative. And I find it refreshing when the folks at 1 Park Avenue create the initiative for extending Ed's idea and then go get a foundation grant to make it possible. I want to say to Jack and to Thea, you know, way to go!

The second reason explains the first, I think, and it's more fundamental, and it is that we, a bunch of smart people who do a good job of running our presses by and large, have too seldom taken the time to decide who and what we really are as an Association, and where we ought to go as an Association, and how we ought to get there as an Association. Over the years, some significant starts have been made--one thinks of course of the Kerr Report, the Schulman-Ingle blueprint, the Seltzer White Paper--and yet I would wager that if somehow we could require each AAUP member present to furnish its own answers to those questions of who and where and how, we'd get seventy-six different sets of answers and, I daresay, a lot of blanks left blank.

So, just as many predecessors at this podium dreamed their dreams and shared them with you, let me tell you mine. It's modest. It's that in the year ahead the Association of American University Presses can finally define its own purpose, and that for all our sakes we can bring that off with something like unanimity. Now I'm not so brash or so foolish or so arrogant as to believe that a year in the presidency confers on me the right, much less the wisdom, to do this for you. It's just that I'd like to be there when it happens. The timing is right. The National Enquiry has provided a clear mandate, if we have the good sense to accept it as such; and we who publish the written word ought to believe it when we see it on the wall. The message is simple: get your act together, cooperate, do together more of the things that you cannot do alone. I say the timing is right. All of you have either received or soon will receive a report of a study commissioned last year by President Hodgson and carried out by August Frugé and Jack Schulman. This report contains the best advice of two wise men eminently qualified to advise us. I hope it will serve as the take-off point for figuring out just what it is we want to get out of our Association together. It is my intention to call a midwinter meeting of university press directors and to make discussion of the Frugé-Schulman report one of the main orders of business.

We shall convene this formally as a business meeting of the AAUP so that discussion can be followed by decisions that commit and bind the Association to certain agreed upon courses of action. And to this end, I earnestly request all press directors to read and digest the report and form your own opinions, discuss it with your staff as you think proper, but above all, I request you to be prepared to act on it so that we don't just talk it to death.

While on the subject of that midwinter meeting, the second main item on the agenda will be the troublesome old question of standards. Now that is a question that won't go away. The standards we profess to uphold mirror the purpose and character of our Association, and it makes a great deal of difference whether we are a trade association or a professional society, a business alliance, a social club or a gang of thieves. Each has different purposes and different standards, and I am not so much concerned with how the IRS sees us and classifies us as I am with how we see ourselves. As far as I know, we have more or less and somewhat tentatively, and this came about at the so-called Battle of Ithaca, declared ourselves a professional association. The question of standards comes up again and again and again. I sometimes think of it as kind of thick, simmering stew in which, from time to time, a big bubble of doubt or exasperation rises and then plops open on the surface and dissipates, to be followed by another bubble.

Now some our members, I know, regard standards as a non-issue, a kind of ho-hum silliness about which the less said the better; I disagree. I see standards as eventually one of the most divisive issues vexing the association. Few of us here would question the need for a professional association to uphold certain professional standards in the conduct and performance of its members; I refer not only to standards for admission to membership, but even more directly to standards for the continuing participation of member presses. The question is twofold: first, what standards shall we profess; and second, how shall these standards be applied. The second part of that question is a great deal more difficult, I think, than the first. I hope that the AAUP is ready to confront the issue of standards head-on and to deal with it positively; to that end, I have made standards the sole charge this year to the Committee of Past Presidents. If we have in our midst anything approaching an identifiable, verifiable, certifiable group of wise persons, it would have to be our past presidents. Weldon Kefauver has agreed to chair this committee. It will meet this fall. If it does its work successfully, it will give shape and focus to the issue, and it will put its recommendations into a report that can be distributed to member presses ahead of the midwinter meeting so that at that meeting we can act on it.

Since I have just mentioned one committee, I would like to mention the others. I've not proposed much change in the structure and function of the AAUP and AUPS committees for the year ahead. It seems to me that our committee system in general is satisfactory. I have, however, made a couple of changes. The Committee on Business Management and Fiscal Statistics, I think you know it as BUMAFIS, and the Committee of Information, Technology and Production have been dissolved as such and combined into a single Committee on Systems

and Technology. The Committee on Admissions and Standards, in the light of my charge to the past presidents, has been redefined simply as the Committee on Admissions. All chairmen and committee members have been appointed since the beginning of May in order that they might get a head start on the year's work, and I'm glad to report that a number of them have already managed to meet here in Salt Lake City. Because I believe they need your support and deserve your thanks, I should like to identify the chairmen of next year's committees; it's only lack of time that prohibits my calling the full roll of some five dozen or so committee members. The Committee on Admissions is to be chaired by Dave Bartlett of Temple; Annual Meeting, Sandy Thatcher, Princeton; Book Show, Ed King, Missouri; Copyright, Mike Aronson, Harvard; Education and Training, Ian Montagnes of Toronto; Government, Foundations and Professional Relations, Matt Hodgson of North Carolina; International Cooperation, Tom Webb of Wisconsin; Marketing, Penny Kaiserlian of Chicago; Nominating, Dave Gilbert, Nebraska; Past Presidents, Weldon Kefauver, Ohio State; Scholarly Journals, Ann Reinke of MIT; Systems and Technology, Don George of Columbia.

Now there is one other committee not now in existence, although something like it did once exist, whose appointment I hope the board of directors will authorize. This would be an advisory group drawn from outside the membership of university presses--men and women of stature, such as scholars, librarians, corporate executives, foundation officers, perhaps public officials--they would serve some of the same purposes that are served by the advisory boards of individual presses. Such a group could, I think, help us to extend and maintain our relationships with communities that we properly expect to care about university presses and the work that we do.

A few minutes ago I mentioned standards as an old, old cause of uneasiness within the association. I should like not to mention another one. This is the polarization, sometimes I think an increasing polarization, among our members; I think you know what I mean. The old presses and the new presses, the public and private, the establishment and non-establishment, the haves and have-nots, the large and the small. Will Lockwood, when he was president, referred to this as a problem that may have no solution. He also said that the tensions of such polarization form the core of our creative vitality. Well, I'm sure that's true in the way that Will meant it, but I also believe that the tensions of presses pulling against one another surely inhibit their pulling together. Pulling together is what should concern us most as an Association. As individual publishing houses, our proper concern is first and foremost the well-being of our own presses, and then secondarily, I suppose, the status of scholarly publishing and the condition of scholarship itself. But as an Association our paramount objective must be the common good of university presses--not book publishing, not scholarly publishing, not scholarship, but the common good of university presses, because that's the only reason to have an association of university presses, and the distinction insofar as AAUP is concerned is, I think, critically important. So we therefore must confront, and I hope decide, an issue of what is permissible for the AAUP and for its subsidiary, AUPS.

The Furgé-Schulman report declares that because this issue has not yet been resolved, the association now finds itself, and I quote, "suspended between two positions, immobilized and uncertain."

There seem to be two main schools of thought among us. Both are defensible; both have been defended shrewdly, articulately, vigorously. One contends that AAUP and AUPS should undertake no activity that does not propose to benefit all member presses just about equally. The other holds that AAUP and AUPS may, and therefore presumably should undertake any activity that meets the following conditions. First, it benefits enough presses to make the common good of university presses generally. To my way of thinking the first view is too restrictive, too inhibiting, results in too much lost opportunity, produces too much immobility. The Furgé-Schulman report suggests a number of activities that might be undertaken by the Association, or at least under its aegis. I tick off just a few of them. Many of them are familiar to you: combined purchasing of printing paper and perhaps advertising space at contract rates, cooperative direct mail promotion, creation of an on-demand publishing system, creation and manipulation of a data base (we do after all have the technology now). There is even reference to a pet idea of mine, the establishment of a new division or perhaps a separate corporation to sell books and rights for presses in those parts of the world that we haven't really penetrated yet and cannot afford to penetrate as individual presses. Some of these are probably pretty good ideas, and some of them may not be so hot; but one thing is certain, none of them promises to benefit all presses equally. And so should they therefore be denied to all, even to those that would like to benefit from them? I hope not.

The alternative to moving in such directions is appealing chiefly in its simplicity: to go on holding annual meetings and some workshops, sending questionnaires to one another, and milking the Educational Directory for all it's worth to help pay the bills. Suppose, though, that we do change directions. The kinds of activities are described and the list really ought to be extended. It will take a lot of research, a lot of planning, a lot of work, and who is going to do it? Well, not me, that's for sure. A year ago in Baltimore, I said that I thought the Association had professionalized to a point where it could no longer be supported mostly on the shoulders of volunteer labor. The answer, of course, is that the work must be done by a paid, professional staff and for the time being, at least, that staff is housed at One Park Avenue.

I would be frank in saying that I don't think that we are getting our money's worth yet from the Central Office, and that opinion is not intended in any way whatsoever as criticism of our Central Office Staff. On the contrary, I think we are exceptionally fortunate in our staff. We manage to hire good people. We pay them, I think, fairly; but we don't really utilize their capabilities fully. We make them spend, in my opinion, too much time on busy work and kitchen chores. As for myself, I would like to see what our professional cadre at One Park Avenue can do if we let them do it. And so I

charge the staff, particularly Jack with the help of Jerry and Thea, to tell us what they can do for us and what they think that we, as an Association, ought to be doing. You see, I want them to do some of our thinking for us; after all, they can work at this full time, we can not. And above all, I want them to approach this task as managers and not as minions.

One word is operative in all that I've been trying to say today; the word is cooperation. In my Baltimore sermon last year, I observed that the AAUP had moved successively through what I call the service agency epoch, the pure tobacco era, the period of professionalization; we're ready now to enter the age of cooperation. I believe that together we can do much. We already enjoy a collegial relationship and common purpose that are not available to other publishers, and we would be crazy not to exploit this more fully.

We remind ourselves frequently that we are small, a small part of a small industry. Now that's salutary to be reminded, and yet I remember the words of one of our colleagues as he spoke them in a kind of peroration at our meeting in Nashville. He said, "To label ourselves as weak because we are small, because we are few, is to confuse our power with our size. What is important to remember is that we are rare, we are uncommon, we are good. We are the salt of the earth and we are also its gold." I believe that; I hope you do, and are we really so small after all?

In China this spring I had a long talk with an old book man, a shrewd and wise human being. He knew nothing about American university presses and even less about the Association of American University Presses. When I told him that together last year our members published more than four thousand one hundred new books and three hundred and forty journals, he was astonished; and he said, "Well then you are surely the largest and most important publisher in the United States." I explained to him that it doesn't work that way in our country. I told him that we are seventy-six small publishers, not one big one. "Ah," said Mr. Ho. You know I could sense, I thought, all of the inscrutable wisdom of the Orient bunching behind his eyes as he reflected on this. He said, "Ah so, but you could be the biggest and most important publisher if you could learn to speak with one voice." Wouldn't that be something?