



The Association of American University Presses, Inc.
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AAUP ANNUAL MEETING, JUNE 1975

Address by Robert G. Barnes, Director, Columbia University Press
and President-Elect (1974-1975) of
The Association of American University Presses

The very few thoughts I have to share with you have all been raised before--many at this meeting--by Miriam Brokaw, by Chester Kerr, and in the Guru Sessions. If I am able to give a new emphasis to some, I shall be satisfied.

My remarks may be divided into three parts: first, a few observations about the strengths of a university press; second, a few questions on which I hope we can focus in the year ahead; and third, a comment or two about committees and their work next year.

Since my first Association meeting in Washington in the winter of 1969, I have been impressed that one of the major strengths of university press publishing is its spirit of "one for all and all for one." This splendid display of cooperation is evidenced over and over again at annual meetings, workshops, guru sessions and regional meetings, and the responses by presses to other presses' request for counsel and advice.

A small example of this occurred yesterday in the "Selling to Libraries" session, when Guru Gary Trim offered to share with all there his list of Chicago's 20 largest accounts. Most of us have grown to take co-operation like this for granted. We should not take it for granted. It should be nurtured and expanded.

In a more personal way this "all for one and one for all" spirit was reflected in my own reception to this fraternity. I have always been grateful to you all for my welcome, and hope that our newest members Brigham Young and New England, will feel as I did.

To ensure that this continues and improves we are forming a new committee of past presidents. All former association presidents, whether active or retired will be members; one of their responsibilities will be to see that "newcomers" become "oldtimers" at their first meeting.

A second strength comes from our origins. Let me quote in part from our By-Laws: "A University Press is hereby defined as the scholarly publishing arm of the university... whose name it bears. Further, it must be an integral part of its parent institution.... Its organization and functions shall lie entirely within the prescription of its parent university...."

This strength resulting from that association is evidenced in several ways. First, we are usually classified as non-profit and therefore tax free. Let's not overlook this strength. George Brockway was certainly quick to point it out this morning.

Second, our "parent" names lend authority to our books, our microfiche, and audio visual products.

Third, our university affiliation opens doors to us: to authors, foundations and governments.

Fourth, and less tangible, though no less real or valuable: our parental name lends prestige to our products and our positions.

In short, I believe we are strengthened by our origins and this suggests to me that we have spent too much time talking about, and writing about, survival--especially in the statement of Reciprocal Responsibilities of a University and Its Press. We have hashed and rehashed self-serving phrases such as, and I quote, "The university should no more require its press to meet all its expenses from sales receipts than it requires other academic departments to meet theirs from tuition receipts."

I cannot believe that the results at Case Western or at Northwestern would have been different had this booklet been read beforehand by those presidents. The sentiments are fine but I feel it is presumptuous for us to state them.

I sense here that Bernard Perry has earned for his press the confidence and treatment we all seek. The evidence has been apparent from Dr. Well's and Dr. Ryan's comments and presence at our dinner.

I raise then the question: How do we grow stronger so that university presidents will wish to publish this kind of statement?

I am confident that we are on the right track in this Association. We need to do more of what we are already doing: cooperating and exchanging ideas--despite George Brockway's message to ignore what others are doing and do it yourself.

Now I should like to repeat some oft-stated questions:

One, how do we make our books more readable--hence more saleable? Should we spend more time and money on rewriting? Should the author pay for this in reduced royalties? We deal with authors, not writers. Certainly some reviewers think this! In a New York Times Book Review recently, a reviewer said "none of the barbed wire of scholarly writing is set in the readers' path."

Two, how can we price our books so we can survive, and yet offer books at a price our customers can afford? Some would answer: "Raise the price to a realistic level, based on a realistic sales estimate." That is only a part answer. Other solutions may lie in more economical methods of editing, more economy in design, more economy in manufacturing, more economy in distribution, and, of course, greater sales per title.

Three, how can we obtain more subsidies? We may be overlooking opportunities for funding smaller projects, by appeals to smaller foundations. I urge that you pay special attention to those foundations with broad purposes, but narrow geographical areas of spending.

Four, what are the proper parameters of university press publishing? Is our sphere defined by the type of book? (Monograph, upper-level text, cookbook, or an urban folklore book?) By the type of market? (scholars, teachers, educated laymen?), or by the originality of the work and the authority of the author?

Five, how do we convert our inventory into cash, and then eventually into other scholarly books? The seeds of an answer may lie in the thousands of books sold by Harvard, MIT, and others in their inventory sales and here I seem to be agreeing with George Brockway.

Six, what is our responsibility to the scholarly world with respect to continuing a slow-moving title in print? Inventory costs money. Is it better to keep 10 titles in print for twenty years, or to shorten their lives, freeing capital to publish otherwise not published titles?

Seven, how do we convince our authors and our customers that we serve scholarship well when we publish in typewriter composition format?

Eight, is the answer to surviving to be found in greater sharing of services? Should every press be organized to fulfill editorial, design, production, marketing, accounting, and fulfillment functions? Or should some presses maintain only their editorial independence? I recall, and subscribe to, Arthur Rosenthal's eloquent statement at Spring Lake, when he stressed the paramount importance of the editor. To be a publisher one must have editors, the other functions are all more or less expendable.

I could go on with my list of questions. But I have, I trust, made the point and there are many questions. Where are the answers?

The answers lie with various members of this organization. Our strength lies in their willingness to share their answers with you and with me. And the vehicle for this communication is the Association, and, more specifically, its Committees.

Those of you who will attend the business sessions tomorrow, know something of the activities of last year's committees. You have also had hints of the plans of the committees for next year. In the charge to committee chairmen, I urged them to expand or contract their missions as seemed best to them and as evidenced by your communication with them.

I urge members here present to consider themselves ex-officio members of every committee. Ask questions and help with answers.

Some committees will be working on solutions to some of the questions I have just raised, and some of the questions raised in the Guru Sessions. I shall not here take the time to restate the charges to all committees, but do wish to cite a few:

Jim Johnston and his Production Committee have been asked to take a hard look at production economies. Strictly from the top of my head, I should guess that member presses spend in the neighborhood of \$10,000,000 per year on manufacturing, of which perhaps \$5,000,000 is spent on composition. Just think what a small percentage saving in this expenditure would do for all of us!

Matt Hodgson and the Government and Foundation Relations Committee will be concerned with the National Enquiry, about which Chester spoke so eloquently.

Miriam Brokaw and the Committee on Institutional and Professional Relations will concentrate their attention on the learned societies that comprise our authors and our customers. They will also be considering how we can better communicate with our parent universities, the review media, and libraries, etc.

Sandy Thatcher and the Copyright Committee face a critical year in which laws may be enacted that will seriously affect our future. We shall expect them to inform us, alert us, and recommend a course for concerted action.

Brian Murphy chairs a new committee with the broadest of charges--the Management and Marketing Committee. I am convinced that if we are to grow stronger, this committee must produce. We must find means for greater productivity by all departments and all individuals. We must learn not only how to materially increase our average sales per title, but we must learn how to sell more dollars worth of books per press employee.

No, I am not suggesting that accounting and marketing are our ultimate answer. I am suggesting that this group can spotlight areas of potential danger and potential success. They may even show presses the way to make Alden Whitman's article a truth rather than a dream.

Let me summarize with these few thoughts: First, there is strength in university publishing. Second, this Association exists to assist us in amplifying that strength. Let's learn to use it more effectively. And last, let us stop worrying about survival and get on with the task of deserving to survive.

Now, if super ennuui has not set in, I would like one more minute. I challenge Jane Isay, next year's chairman, to produce a better cast of speakers, excepting this one, than Lawrence Towner, George Brockway, Doris Grumbach and Miriam Brokaw.

Indiana has put on a great show. We congratulate Bernard Perry, his staff, Chief Guru Bob Bletter and his 26 Guruesses and Gurus. And last of all--and most of all--we thank Miriam. She has our respect and our love. It was tough to follow her act tonight; I can only try to fill her shoes next year.