



The Association of American University Presses, Inc.
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AAUP ANNUAL MEETING, JUNE 1973

Remarks by Thompson Webb, Jr., Director, The University of Wisconsin Press
and President-Elect (1972-1973) of
The Association of American University Presses

Mr. President, guests, and fellow publishers. Two weeks ago on my way to a meeting of the editorial board of The University of Wisconsin Press, in the conference building where many committees, boards, and agencies of the University hold their meetings, I found on three successive doors walking down that hall, the following designations of what was to go on in the rooms behind those doors. The first one read, "How to communicate effectively." The second read, "Warm air heating"; the third, "University Press." Somehow I felt at home in that environment.

This occasion here in Austin has been a great one for me. Returning to Austin again and enjoying the wonderful hospitality of Frank and Rosemary and of our friends at the Texas Press and at this University has been just plain pleasure. I have thoroughly enjoyed it, and I would like to make my personal comment on that while I have the floor.

It has been a great experience, but at the same time there have been notes of sadness too: Roger Shugg's retirement--the fact that we won't have him with us longer, at least on the same basis. I hope he will join us frequently in future years. I know also you all felt as I did the poignant mixed emotions of admiration and a sense of tragedy in the perception of the true stature of the man as we heard Bill Crawford speak yesterday of his experience with such restraint and eloquence.

This past year, being a Director of AAUP has been a rewarding experience as well. The Bailey administration has been marked by real achievement on the part of the Association. One of the most notable and effective was the appointment by Herb a year ago of representatives from among us who were charged with establishing direct professional-level communication with learned societies. You know, I am sure, that this was a Bailey idea, first given public note in his talk to us at South Bend. He appointed Matt Hodgson to represent the AAUP among historians and Will Lockwood among humanists, notably the MLA.

These relationships are important to all of us, and I am sure that this is clear to everyone. I can report that the Association has been well served by its representatives. I have asked them to continue next year in the same capacities, and I have added a third. Herb at my urgent request has agreed to represent AAUP to the societies in the science area.

Out of Matt's and Herb's activities with governmental agencies and politicians this year, has come what may be a major breakthrough in regard to the Government. This concerns support at the Federal level for scholarly publishing. In order to pursue this development, which is of major importance, a new committee will be appointed, one probably entitled something like "The Committee for Government and Foundation Relations". Herb has agreed to serve as its chairman along with Matt and several others.

The full significance of these developments will become apparent in the course of time, but there is reason now to believe that we are on the threshold of events that will affect all of us for many years. All that I can say at this time is that each of us is far more deeply in Matt Hodgson's debt than many realize.

Through his efforts and those of Herb Bailey certain agencies of the Federal Government seem disposed to grant publishing subsidies to university presses. But a word of warning. The situation is extremely sensitive. I am convinced that university presses committed to publishing books within the purview of a number of national commissions and agencies must act together, in cooperation with the activities of the newly appointed AAUP Committee on Government Relations that I referred to earlier. Once the principle is firmly established that such agencies as the National Endowment for Humanities and the National Historical Publications Commission will regard the scholarly projects that they choose to sponsor financially and in their totality, then I believe that presses can and perhaps should pursue their special needs and interests without regard to the Association; but, for the present and the immediate future, I suggest that it would be unwise, perhaps even folly, for any member of the Association to go his or her own way and to refuse to take part in what we believe should be a well orchestrated, deliberately paced program of educating further the members of Congress and its appropriate agencies to the purposes and needs of scholarly publishers.

It seems to me, and to my advisors and correspondents, that Washington ultimately might become the largest source of outside funding for university presses, unless through precipitate activities of individual presses we inadvertently alarm or offend those on Capitol Hill whom we now consider to be our tentative friends and allies.

Related in another way to Matt Hodgson's activities is a different change that I expect to encourage in AAUP procedures in the following year. We are all aware of the presses which have been either put out of business or seriously threatened with that fate this year. The AAUP has lent its support where it could, but there is so little that we can really do when a university administration hard-pressed for money announces that it will no longer support its press. Administrators at such time are prone to fall back on the excuse that there are too many university presses anyway. Some support for this last view has come to my ear from an extraordinary quarter during the past year--actually from our staunchest friends, the historians. Matt Hodgson reports, in talking to the societies within his direct charge, that a number of senior historians have expressed the view that there are too many university presses. I think that this kind of feeling contributes to the threat to us all.