



The Association of American University Presses, Inc.

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Address by Thompson Webb, Jr., Director, The University of Wisconsin Press
and President (1973-1974) of
The Association of American University Presses

The President's Report, on what presidents are inclined to call their "stewardship," is often an earnest attempt to impress constituents. This Association does not give me that opportunity. Following in the footsteps of Herbert Bailey and William Harvey, I must stick to facts, some uncomfortable and above all to make this short. I have some bad news and some serious worries to report. I can also point to accomplishments; but, as President, I can claim little personal credit for the real achievements of this year. They are, first, the work of an able Board of Directors and, second, the signal achievements of the Committee on Government and Foundation Relations, whose activities this year I believe to be the most significant of any aspect of the Association's business.

Late last spring, soon after the news that Case Western Reserve had decided to close its press, came word of the dismissal of Robert Plant Armstrong as Director of Northwestern University Press, action that was followed early this year by the announcement that Northwestern too had decided to close its press. The demise of a member of our Association is a serious matter, one that makes each of us consider soberly his own relations with his university, its administration, and its faculty. These have been and continue to be difficult times for scholarly publishing, and the action taken at Northwestern, along with decisions on several other campuses to reduce press activities--in one place it is down to what they have called a "holding action"--is a clear sign that the hard times about which we university publishers have been talking for several years have not passed. They are with us. They will continue with us. The significance of this observation is that the survival of any one of us may come into question at any time. The message: each must be diligent in the search for ways in which to make his own press as nearly self sufficient as possible. At the same time, we must not lose sight of our duty to scholarship, although these two obligations at times are seemingly in direct opposition to one another.

The very life blood of publishing, copyright, is currently under serious threat. The Williams & Wilkins case has turned against us and now must be carried to the Supreme Court of the United States. During the year just passed, the AAUP joined the AAP in filing representations to the Supreme Court, petitioning it to take up this case. In this, we have been successful, as reported in PW on June 10, and AAP and AAUP will continue with amicus-curiae briefs. If the Court should not decide in favor of protecting copyright,

university presses may well be the publishers to suffer most. Popular journals and books have relatively little to fear from the kind of Xeroxing that is the issue in this case. The National Library of Medicine will probably not be sending photocopies of Playboy to their correspondents. The teacher who reproduces a chapter from a book for distribution in his classroom is not likely to be lifting this from a novel he bought in the bus station. The works most likely to be exploited by uncontrolled duplication are the kinds that we publish at heavy expense in order to make them available to the scholars and other readers who need them. The unrestricted right on the part of libraries and classroom teachers to reproduce what they please would be a direct threat to the ability of all of us to recover the cost of the publications duplicated.

The Supreme Court's recent redefinition of obscenity leaving it to individual states to define community standards threatens all publishing in this country. Fortunately, a number of states--my own among them, I am glad to say--have recognized that such standards must be statewide, at least, not left to the discretion of smaller communities. A recent opinion of the Supreme Court of Wisconsin is explicit to the effect that a book or film sold legally on one side of the street is not to be declared obscene on the other. How sensible it would have been for the United States Supreme Court to have ruled as a matter of national interest that what is acceptable on one side of a state line should not be subject to prosecution on the other; but since the federal court has ruled as it has, the AAUP has been active this year opposing legislation in the several states that would place the responsibility for judging what is obscene on communities smaller than the whole state. Our colleagues in Pennsylvania have fought a gallant battle in that state during the year, and legislation that would have left the definition of obscenity to counties, cities, and villages was averted by the narrowest of margins--a courageous veto by the Governor. Legislation in the state of New York to the same effect is still under active consideration. In these states, and elsewhere, as these matters have come up, our Executive Secretary and the Board of Directors have filed briefs in defense of the principles of freedom of press and the freedom to read. Often the obligation to present the views of this Association has arisen suddenly and at awkward times. I should like particularly to commend the devotion of colleagues on the Board and of Jack Putnam in this regard. Furthermore, an ad-hoc committee of the Board devoted much time to drafting an effective statement, which I think you have all seen, to be held in reserve. It is available to any member or any officer of the Association for use, with appropriate modifications to fit local circumstances, in presenting the position of this Association with respect to the current definition of obscenity in this country.

The news I most regret announcing is that the Board of Directors has had to face the fact of inflation and is recommending an increase in Association dues for next year. We searched long and seriously for means to postpone an increase for at least one more year, but the pace of inflation during the last few months of the fiscal year and the expectation that there will be two fewer dues-paying members during the coming year make it plain that the cost of the Association to its members, like all the other costs we have to face these days, must be increased.

On the other hand, the Association is in sound financial condition, and we are hopeful for improvement in the coming year. As you know, we have a new team in AUPS--having lost, tragically in one case, key persons there. We have been fortunate in finding replacements of the finest quality and impressive experience. Since AAUP depends heavily on income derived by AUPS, specifically from the Educational Directory, I am glad to report that the new team is now fully fielded and that the new programs of ED are on the market. I hope that you have all examined the latest catalog. We believe that ED can best its competition, increase the revenue of AUPS, and thus continue to contribute to supporting AAUP in the condition to which we all hope to keep it accustomed.

I trust that all of you have heard that the Committee for Institutional Cooperation (CIC) an organization of Big-10 universities, became interested about three years ago in economies that might be achieved through cooperative action on the part of the presses of their institutions. CIC commissioned Carroll Bowen to survey the Big-10 presses and search for areas of cooperation which might offer economies. The Bowen Report of a year ago pointed to one area, that of warehousing, order fulfillment, and shipping; and CIC has continued its study in that direction. Since collective action of the kind in which CIC is interested would result in greater economies as the number of participating presses increases, they invited AAUP to join their investigation, and the Board accepted. Jack Putnam and I with Frederick Jackson of CIC have studied warehousing and order fulfillment at Princeton University Press and the University of Chicago Press, and CIC obtained from the Carnegie Corporation a modest grant for a feasibility study. I hope that all of you have seen our former colleague, John Solon, here with us. He has accepted CIC's commission to conduct this investigation. It holds potential of importance to many of us, and I am particularly glad that it has been entrusted to John. He has been one of us, and is now a university administrator. His special combination of experience should make his counsel in these matters of great value. I look forward to his report.

By far the most significant development during the past year is one for which the President of AAUP can claim no credit. As I stated in Austin, I believe that the most important potential source of publishing funds for university presses must be the federal government. Fortunately, NSF, NIH, Office of Education, and other federal agencies have long recognized their obligation to support publication of research conducted under their programs. Still, recognition of the need for publishing funds has not been universal throughout the government. During the year just passed our Committee on Government and Foundation Relations has been engaged in a major effort to persuade the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the National Historical Publications Commission (NHPC) to adopt policies by which publishing funds could be made available through those agencies. The Committee, after an enormous amount of work, has now submitted a major request to NEH. This is to be considered at their meeting in August. This request, for more than a million dollars, is for money to assist in the publication of the volumes sponsored by the Center for Editions of American Authors (CEAA). We are all looking forward with great hope to a favorable decision by NEH.

In addition, the same AAUP committee has been negotiating with the NHPC with the result that NHPC now has two hundred and thirty thousand dollars appropriated by Congress specifically to support publications by university presses. This money is to assist publication of so-called "Founding Fathers" projects, and there is every reason to believe that money in the amount of a quarter of a million dollars will be available for university presses from the same source annually in the future.

Some member presses publish neither CEAA nor Founding Fathers projects. I trust that they will see the activities of the Committee on Government and Foundation Relations in a broad perspective. The latest Bailey/Becker Report underscores with a heavy pencil the dependence of all of us these days on individual-book subsidies. Establishing the principle among federal agencies of providing such subsidies is a breakthrough of major proportions, for all of us. What this Committee has done through NHPC is of importance to every member press of this Association whether it publishes Founding Fathers or not. If the application to NEH succeeds, the significance will be immeasurable. If government agencies that grant research funds accept the principle that they have an obligation to support publication of the results of that research, this committee may have brought about the most significant development in scholarly publishing of the last five years.

The members of the Committee on Government and Foundation Relations deserve profound gratitude from every member of this Association, and I offer them sincere thanks for their extensive, intelligent, and unremitting activities. In particular, I want to extend our thanks to Matt Hodgson. As a member of the Committee, he deserves his share of the credit for all that it has achieved. In addition, Matt on his own time has devoted long hours to the collective interests of this Association among the bureaus and offices in Washington. I am afraid that few here today fully appreciate the extent of what Matt has done for all of us and the time that he has spent in our behalf. We are all deeply in his debt. To him, I extend thanks, both personally and on the part of the whole Association.

Finally, I can report what seems to me a significant discovery in the field of marketing. In imitation of bolder and larger colleagues in the Association, the University of Wisconsin Press last fall announced a major book sale, every title on our list reduced, some by unbelievable discounts. In a tabloid-size brochure, we spread the word of this sale into some 200,000 homes and offices across the land. After the brochure had gone out, I read it. It was then that I discovered that one title listed was advertised at "regular price \$6.00, special sale price \$10.00." When the sale was over, I asked for a report on that title. Sixteen customers had sent us prepaid orders for it at the special sale price.

On that note, I look to the future.