

Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom

Published by the Committee on Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association and prepared by Paul Bixler, Secretary

Correction: In the last issue of the Newsletter appeared an item mistakenly inferring that the Alabama State Board of Education had passed a resolution requesting textbook publishers to ascertain that authors, editors and illustrators of textbooks are not and have not been members of the Communist Party, of any organization on the Attorney General's list, or of a Communist front registered under the Federal Security Act of 1950. Such a resolution was drawn up, but in fact the Alabama Board refused to pass it, an action (or lack of action) which belatedly we applaud.

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Last month we visited Washington and listened to some of the testimony presented before the House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials under the chairmanship of Representative Ezekiel C. Gathings, and a few days ago we had a chance to examine the Committee Report which includes a minority report signed by Representatives Emanuel Celler and Francis E. Walter. (The Report is now available to libraries as House Report no. 2510 of the 82nd Congress; the complete hearings will not be available for another week or two.) That there is a problem in the mass and in the quality of comic books, "girlie" magazines, and pocket-size books now offered on newsstands is plain enough after examining the evidence. One problem lies in the fact that on some newsstands the trash and the dirt is shouldering legitimate and entertaining reading off the shelves or into the background. Another is that some materials suitable only for adults are now made available to adults and juveniles in cheap reprint at the corner store. Problems like these seem plainer than any of the suggested solutions.

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Anyone reading the Committee Report will find some confusion over just what materials are at fault. "Unofficial circulation figures," according to the Report, show that there are 70 million comic book readers in the United States -- a readership representing a circulation which "far surpasses that of all books, magazines and periodicals combined." Assemblyman Joseph Carlino of the New York legislature estimated that 30 per cent of comics (100 million sold a month) "contain some very objectionable material." It was testified that over 150 million copies of popular periodicals are issued per month, and Mrs. Margaret Culkin Banning testified from the research she did for her article, "Filth on the Newsstands" in the October Reader's Digest, that one person in every ten is a reader of the "girlies" or objectionable group. Pocket-size books are of more recent growth, but giving them every benefit of uncertainty about the amount of their production and sale, their influence (compared to that of the comics and "girlies") is no better, or worse, than third, and if one is measuring the percentage of "questionable" or "objectionable" materials (singled out as such in the Committee's own judgment) it is a very, very poor third.

On a basis of volume or of number of readers, one would assume that obscene (or "objectionable") comic books, magazines and pocket books merited the nation in that descending order. But if the amount of attention and space respectively given them are the criteria, then the Committee stood the order of merit on its head. There are 36 pages of summary before testimony in the Report, of which 3 are devoted to magazines, 6 to comics, 8 to general comment, and 19 pages to books, principally pocket-size books.

This reversal of the natural order held good for much of the testimony also. Six publishers testified -- none on comics, one on magazines, five on books. In the five days the only detailed testimony on comic books came from Assemblyman Carlino, member of a committee investigating comics for the New York legislature.

The Report makes much of the bad impression created by objectionable American materials abroad -- admittedly a serious situation. From the complaints by foreign governments and critics and by UNESCO which are quoted in the Report the principal offenders turn out to be comic books and comic strips, with magazines a secondary offender; American books are specifically attacked in a foreign quote but once, and then in a manner which is clearly exaggerated. Furthermore, there is no recognition here that the wide distribution of American pocket-size books abroad has contributed positive assistance to American foreign policy and American foreign interests.

Just what are the implications of laying the major blame for trash and obscenity upon pocket-size books and their publishers? The fact is that nearly all such books are reprints of works published by major American publishing houses -- the major source, or at least one of the major sources, of serious thought and ideas in this country. One is inclined to ask whether the anti-intellectual drive of our time has become so pervasive as to take in intelligent Congressmen. Or are comics old-hat as a public menace, there being more headlines in the new and large (but still minor as compared to comics and magazines) pocket-book industry? Representatives Celler and Walters do not answer these questions directly but they do devote the few pages of their minority report to a defense of ideas and of books in all their variety.

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From testimony in the hearings it appeared that in some areas in the country the mass of objectionable material is pushing legitimate publications off the newsstands. (Insofar as pocket-size books are part of this system of distribution, they appear not to have had responsibility for establishing it, but to have inherited it.) Although the Federal Trade Commission Act and the Clayton Act are designed to discourage monopoly, "tie-in" agreements and "full-line forcing" (arrangements whereby the producer or wholesaler forces the retailer to display all of his goods for sale or receive nothing) prevent the newsstand dealer from selecting what he wants to sell. There was a suggestion in the hearings that in some cases state laws might remedy the condition. But it seems clear that restrictive practices, whether of good or bad materials, should be discouraged, and that enabling the dealer to reject as well as select his printed wares is in the interest of free enterprise,

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Much was made of the publishers' responsibility for the quality and legitimacy of their publication, and a code of practice was suggested somewhat similar to that for motion pictures. Mr. Arch Crawford, President of the Magazine Publishers Association, rejected this suggestion for his group on the grounds that there are federal laws to prevent restraint of trade, which in this case might be interpreted to have taken place when the larger (more respectable) publishers attempted to make the smaller (and often the "offending") publishers fall into line. In the face of this and other objections the Report urges as one of its concluding recommendations that the publishing industry recognize "the growing public opposition" to "borderline or objectionable" publications, but says nothing about a code.

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Committee members repeatedly put themselves on record during the hearings as opposed to censorship. On the national level there is good reason to accept such statements at their face value.

The danger of censorship -- and this should be of particular interest to libraries -- lies on the local level. From some of the testimony it is clear that censorship is already being attempted, and the tendency of the Report is likely to encourage such efforts.

One of the witnesses, the Rev. Thomas J. Fitzgerald, representing the National Council of Catholic Men, presented before the Committee a long list under the heading of Magazines Disapproved by the National Organization of Decent Literature: November, 1952; Publications Found Objectionable for Youth By the Decency Committee. Under this heading were listed 32 comic books, 106 magazines, 218 pocket-size books; on the back of the list appeared 124 "Acceptable" comics, 3 "Recommended Quarter Books for Children", and 2 "Recommended Pocket-Sized Books for Teenagers." The objectionable list included not only Amboy Dukes, the single pocket-size book to receive full treatment in the hearings (Judge James V. Mulholland of New York City presented considerable evidence to show that Amboy Dukes was inappropriate and often harmful reading for anyone not adult) but a number of books considered modern (if minor) classics.

When such lists are carefully and critically drawn up they may be valuable. But in the rest of the Rev. Fitzgerald's testimony there is the threat if not the fact of censorship: as one example, "...you have got a czar in baseball; you have got a czar in pro football...why shouldn't you have some sort of a reviewing board similarly in this particular field that would protect the honest publisher?"

In his mimeographed statement given to the Committee the Rev. Fitzgerald offered six suggestions, of which the last was that this "Congressional Committee be established as a Continuing Committee to study the problem of objectionable and obscene literature and to submit reports to Congress." This recommendation is omitted from the printed Committee Report. But on January 5 a resolution was introduced in the new Congress asking for the creation of a similar continuing committee.

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Another bit of testimony which may have implications for libraries is that of Inspector Herbert W. Case in charge of the license and censor bureau for the Detroit Police Department. His testimony is too long and involved to summarize here, and moreover, even after a careful reading of the full transcript, one would hesitate to render a total judgement (favorable or unfavorable) on the Detroit system without some first-hand experience with it. The operating group is no conventional blue-nose outfit. Something of its outlines may be gathered from the following notes:

The censor part of Inspector Case's bureau operates under Michigan's obscenity laws. The inspector cooperates closely with the prosecutor's office, takes as few cases to court as possible but makes as certain as possible of a conviction. Of the few cases he has brought to court he has not lost one. He is not interested in "front-page publicity" but in keeping obscene materials out of circulation. Usually he goes direct to the distributors who are men "of good repute" and they usually withdraw or withhold undesirable materials voluntarily. It is the bureau's intention "to sensibly prosecute and never persecute."

In 1948 the censor part of the bureau correlated into one head the handling of comic books, magazines and pocket-size books. Screening these materials is a principal part of the job of 12 men at a cost of \$70,000 a year. This year, with pocket-size books involved, it demanded of these men 750 hours of overtime.

When "the comic book situation" came to a head there were about 380 titles that had to be screened. About 80 of these appeared to Inspector Case's men to violate the law and were taken to the prosecuting attorney's office. The prosecuting attorney judged 48 to be in violation. Said Inspector Case, "We then informed the distributor, that is, the wholesaler, who, in turn, notified the publisher, that they were in violation of our state statute, that they would have to be withheld from circulation, or they could be defended in court... in a test case".... The result was that they were withheld."

As for magazines, there have recently been 453 titles handled, "with 17 banned."

Complaints about pocket-size books began coming in in 1950, and in 1951 the bureau began screening titles, and "cataloging" them, "with a cross-index filing system on the excerpts." For 1952 the result was: "Books inspected so far this year 1,039" and "Titles withheld from circulation or banned, 54." To date no banned pocket-size book has been taken to court: all have been withdrawn "voluntarily." Inspector Case doesn't "see any reason why we, in Detroit, should have to screen these things": he believes keeping this material free from any violation of the law "definitely is the publisher's responsibility." The publishers themselves, he thinks, should bring "into the fold the unscrupulous few who... are a menace to the entire country."

The inspector is well aware that child psychologists can be called in as consultants on reading materials. He is aware that he and his bureau are not infallible and that they can make mistakes. In his opinion the most essential single item in an effective campaign against obscene materials is "militant public opinion." He and his men make a great many public talks. They meet with parent-teacher groups, with service organizations and many others. "We like to show them what we are striving to do," says the inspector, "whether or not they agree with our efforts" or believe that "we are centering our efforts in the right direction." They receive many complaints, discover many times that they are "on the opposite side of the fence" from these groups, and then they try to explain why they "are not taking action."

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Inspector Case has already made his system effective in Wayne County beyond the limits of the City of Detroit, and has offered assistance to other Michigan communities. According to him, police departments in smaller communities do not have the manpower, they will have to depend upon someone else, and if he and his fellow officers are in a position to act "as big brothers to smaller communities" as indicated, they "will be only too glad to help."

Among several similar methods of controlling similar situations explained at the hearings, Inspector Case's was easily the most intelligently presented and the most effective. It is quite possible that efforts will be made to imitate the Detroit system or to carry out its purposes in other communities. But whatever evaluation one may put upon the total Detroit system, efforts at imitation seem hazardous. Few if any other communities could afford the police manpower or find the quality of men. Such value as it has lies elsewhere--in a democratically fostered public opinion, properly applied. And that is what librarians and others interested in intellectual freedom should encourage if and when "control" of "obscene" materials comes to their community.

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In Publishers' Weekly for January 10 (pp. 125-27) appear a report on the Gathings Committee Report and a reply to a complaint that "pornography" is being distributed to troops in Korea. The Committee Report, incidentally, included this complaint. But it omitted the quotes from a Korean serviceman given in Mrs. Banning's testimony to the effect that we wouldn't be in the trouble we're in today in Korea if it weren't for a couple of governments which make a practice of trying to tell the rest of the world what to think, see and read.

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Word comes from Mrs. May Valencik of the Allentown (Pa.) Free Public Library that a news suggestion service, subscribed to by many small newspapers, has taken up an idea growing out of the recent attack of the Boston Post on the Boston Public Library (see our last issue). The service suggests that a newspaper may get a good feature story by seeking out the attitude of the librarian and the trustees about communist materials in the local public library. If this suggestion is acted upon in your community, one approach is to point out to the editor or reporter that withdrawing materials on communism from the library would be comparable to the newspaper's keeping out of its columns all dispatches from Moscow and Eastern Europe and refusing to print all quotations from Stalin.

We are sending along with this Newsletter an editorial column by Maynard Kniskern of the Springfield (O.) Sun. Your editor may be interested in that also.

Other items will have to await the next Newsletter, which we hope to issue soon.

Paul Bixler  
(from Antioch College  
Yellow Springs, O.)

## LIBRARY TRUSTEES DISCUSS RUSSIAN LANGUAGE AND COMMUNIST LITERATURE PROBLEMS

Not long ago a story about a public library trustees meeting appeared in the newspaper of an Ohio city. One of the problems facing the library, so the story read, concerned the buying of phonograph records for learning the Russian language. The library is near an Army installation, and there had been requests for materials to assist in learning Russian.

This topic lead to a discussion of books on communism in the library. One trustee said that he had been able to find only "one or two books" in a list on communism put out by the American Bar Association. The clerk of the board said that "men in the factories tell me, "You'd better not get any Russian books in the library or we won't come in.!" He said that he himself had no objection to the books.

Other words were passed back and forth in the meeting, but from the news report the board had apparently only been "discussing" and had not as yet come to any final decision. Here was a "live" situation in intellectual freedom. Had pressure groups become "interested," the situation might quickly have begun to deteriorate. In the following Sunday's issue of the newspaper, however, appeared a column by the editor--a column which effectively scotched any tendency toward censorship. We reproduce that column here not only for its common sense but as an example of effective community leadership:

### WARDER'S 'RED' BOOKS

By Maynard Kniskern

#### Are Basic Communist Works A Menace in Public Libraries -- And If So, To Whom?

The trustees of Warder Public Library had a discussion at a board meeting the other day concerning "books on communism" and phonograph records for teaching the Russian language. The Library has very few authoritative "books on communism" and no Russian-language records at all, but apparently even such sparse material as it does have is enough to excite suspicion in a few people.

That kind of suspicion would be difficult to take seriously except for the fact that it originates with the very persons who most need to be educated in the ways and means of communism. One thing they could learn in a library is that communists are never made in libraries; they are made in slums, gutters, dark alleyways, and dingy meeting halls.

Another fact easily ascertained by anybody willing to look into the matter is that people are converted to communism for intensely personal and emotional reasons which have their roots in poverty, malnutrition, social disadvantages, civil unrest, and real or fancied slights leading to a sense of frustration. The occasional wealthy person who turns to communism does so through an appeal to his vanity, or his desire for power, or both.

Now such individuals are almost never confirmed in their course by reading books; and anyhow if they ever do get around to pursuing "basic" communist works it is only after the damage has been done. Normally, however, such people read only the crudely-written pamphlets produced specifically for them--stuff that is far too low-grade to be accorded a place in any library. And of much greater importance than anything in print is the indoctrination they get by word of mouth from experienced comrades--this constituting a good deal more than 99 per cent of the neophyte communist's education.

Still another thing the Nervous Nellies ought to know is that the basic works of communism are (a) virtually unreadable save by scholars, and (b) a vast welter of falsifications, inconsistencies, and self-contradictions. An efficient way of inoculating any prospective communist against communism might be to thrust upon him Karl Marx's "Das Kapital" in its full, fat, two-volume form, or Nikolai Lenin's massively dull "The Development of Capitalism in Russia."

If the would-be Red is sufficiently a scholar to plow through these tomes he will discover that they are at best the product of an obsolete 19th Century sociology (though of course no real communist would dare to admit it openly), and at worst the product of minds unbalanced by a pathological fixation, a messiah-complex.

If the student perseveres beyond Marx and Lenin to Leon Trotsky, the most brilliant and prolific communist "authority," he will discover himself in a maze of absolutely incompatible ideas with a variety of tunnels labeled Marxism Leninism, Trotskyism, and Stalinism. All these tunnels come to dead ends, but the confusion is indescribable.

By this time it would be surprising if the explorer did not sigh with relief upon discovering that he is a good old capitalist or free-enterpriser after all. It would be even more surprising if avowed communists encouraged neophytes to read the basic works of communism--but they don't. For not only are there impossible snarls in those works of antique sociology, but the explorer would soon become aware of the fact that the technical philosophy of communism, "dialectical materialism," is even more hopelessly out of date and even more thoroughly discredited by the course of history.

In short, not enough scientific and intellectual background survives in 20th Century communism to attract even the feeble-minded. People who are still recruited to the cause are attracted, as we have noted, for entirely different reasons--entirely personal, emotional, and usually irrational reasons.

So anybody who takes the liberty of criticizing Warder Public Library for harboring a paltry few "books on communism" should also take the trouble of finding out just what those books are all about. Apart from the standard reference and source material every library should own, moreover, there are at least a couple of dozen "books on communism" published within the last 15 years or so which a public library should also possess, for the simple reason that they are profoundly anti-communist.

Of that number might be mentioned several vigorous works on the subject by Roman Catholic Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, a more recent volume by an Episcopal priest the Rev. Charles W. Lowry ("Communism and Christ"), Protestant Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr's superb "The Irony of American History," and Quaker Layman Whittaker Chambers' best-selling "Witness."

One recalls a motto that used to be seen in public schools and textbooks more frequently than it is now: "Knowledge is power." We can't fight communism effectively if we are ignorant of communism; indeed ignorance is the more subversive evil of the two.

A public library is the arsenal of free men. Among other kinds of "ammunition," it contains or should contain those ludicrous communist-made "grenades" which because of defective workmanship, have never exploded in this country and never will, but which can be tossed back into the enemy camp to detonate with great power. This is a job for cool-minded men of learning, and they must not be balked by the timid, fretful, or fearful.

If the Nervous Nellies had their way, no such clear and potent voice could be raised against communism as that of a Sheen, a Lowry, a Niebuhr, or a Chambers, for such influential anti-communists would be denied their fundamental democratic right of investigating the enemy's thought--a necessary preliminary to refuting it.

By military analogy these Christian thinkers (and their numerous Jewish allies, including Martin Buber and Arthur Koestler) might be called "counter-intelligence agents" in the global struggle against communism. We must see to it that our libraries provide the data for their powerful minds, and for the minds of upcoming generations of liberty's champions, until communism is eliminated as a world force.

The alternative is to fight blind. Any American has the privilege of pulling a burlap bag over his head and then trying to box with Rocky Marciano, but no American has the right to force burlap bags over the heads of his fellow-citizens. "Knowledge" of communism is, inevitably, the prime "power" that will destroy it.