



Government Documents and Other Non-Trade Publications

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IN THE UNIVERSE of library acquisitions activities, materials available outside of the commercial book trade are generally relegated to a place of secondary importance. Nothing provides more dramatic confirmation of this fact than a search of the literature, where few articles on the subject are to be located, and where acquisitions texts tend to emphasize book purchases. And yet, in the development of research level collections, it is this class of material which is perhaps most crucial—for the quality of such collections may be measured by their ability to procure the unique and sometimes obscure publication, to cover a subject or field comprehensively or exhaustively, and to provide materials not available in other types of libraries.

Measured in terms of volume alone, the informational materials produced outside of the commercial book trade most probably exceed those produced within it. When one considers that the United States Government Printing Office is the world's largest publisher, and then adds the ever-increasing volume of technical report literature, the publications of other governments and of international organizations, materials issued by associations, learned and scientific societies, and the works of university bureaus and of the non-profit university presses, it is clear that a sizeable annual output is involved. One should also remember that in large areas of the world today, such as Asia and Latin America, commercial publishing and the commercial book trade are not well-developed—so much so that one is not surprised to find a bank or government agency issuing works of literature and poetry, and the typical mode of publication is privately by the author. If we add to this list the whole range of printed ephemera (such as leaflets, posters, playbills, programs, tickets, postcards and

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other "job printing"), some of which is surely worth collecting and preserving, then the total volume with which we are dealing is enormous indeed.

For the acquisitions librarian, these are the "problem" publications. Bibliographic sources are diverse, uneven, and incomplete. Because of their fugitive nature, many of these publications escape the bibliographic net cast by the national bibliographies. Reliance upon these sources, or upon LC proof slips (although much improved for foreign publications since the beginning of the Title II program), will not guarantee complete coverage in either a subject or geographic area. Not only is it difficult to know what has been published outside of the commercial book trade, it is often difficult to locate a source of supply. Few subscription agents will conscientiously undertake to procure such publications on a continuing basis. Indeed, one of the most common complaints against "blanket-order" suppliers has been their failure to include the publications of academic institutions and government departments. Many of these publications are not intended for sale, and some organizations will not accept "standing orders" or subscriptions. Others maintain no permanent headquarters, and their addresses change as frequently as their officers. As a result, the acquisitions librarian in a research library often finds himself dealing with a multitude of individuals, publishers, or organizations, using the strategy of begging, buying, or exchanging, as appropriate.

The technique of procuring non-commercial publications on exchange has been used by libraries for at least several centuries. Von Busse gives numerous examples of eighteenth and nineteenth century exchanges between European university libraries.¹ Although sometimes used as a means of ameliorating the impoverished condition of library book budgets, exchanges are often the only means by which a non-commercial publication may be regularly obtained. Indeed, in recent years some libraries have purchased materials from their own university presses, or from other publishers, for distribution to exchange partners. Publications of academic institutions (foreign institutions especially), and of learned and scientific societies, are particularly susceptible to this type of an acquisitions arrangement. The continuing importance of this acquisitions technique to American research libraries is demonstrated by the 208,000 packages transmitted through the Smithsonian International Exchange Service in 1967.²

In developing exchanges, the acquisitions librarian in a research library will rely heavily upon the UNESCO *Handbook on the Inter-*

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national Exchange of Publications, and upon the supplementary information carried in the *UNESCO Bulletin for Libraries*. Directory sources such as the *Yearbook of International Organizations*, the *International Library Directory*, and the *World of Learning*, and other more specialized sources, are helpful. Access to an ample collection of telephone and geographic directories, and government manuals, is also essential.

Another acquisitions technique, peculiarly suited to the procurement of non-commercial publications, is that of gift solicitation. Special interest organizations, as well as authors whose works have been privately published, are often gratified to find that their publications are of interest to libraries, as Lawrence Thompson has pointed out in his felicitous article entitled "Of Bibliological Mendicancy."³ Many government agencies are also willing to make their publications available without charge, although presumably from a different motivation. So widespread was the latter practice some years ago, that James McCamy was led to write, concerning government publications, that "only the uninformed, the modest, the hurried, or the righteous buy them."⁴ Although, as we shall see below, large classes of government-sponsored publications have been excluded from free distribution, it still remains true that many government documents are available from the issuing agency without charge.

Central to the problem of acquiring government documents for the research library is the need for a convenient source of supply, preferably one offering automatic selective or comprehensive distribution, from which the whole range of current government-sponsored publication is available. In the United States, the federal depository system was originally intended to provide such a source of supply. The clear intent of the General Printing Act of 1895 was to centralize government printing in the Government Printing Office, and to place full control of the distribution of government publications in the Office of the Superintendent of Documents.⁵

Over the years, however, much government publishing has come to be done outside of the Government Printing Office, and the Superintendent of Documents no longer effectively controls the distribution of all government publications. This trend became especially marked with the great proliferation of Federal activities during the New Deal. In 1936, A. F. Kuhlman spoke of an "unprecedented crisis" in the publication and distribution of federal publications, pointing to the "vast amount of material issued by federal agencies outside of

the office of the public printer."⁶ By 1968, this trend had gone even farther, and the Public Printer himself reported to Congress that there were some 300 agency printing plants outside of his control, and that their aggregate annual production was probably equal to that of the Government Printing Office.⁷ Most of the material so produced, of course, is not distributed to depository libraries. In addition, depository libraries do not receive most Congressional Committee prints, many government-produced maps, translations and other works of the Joint Publications Research Service, reports of the Cooperative Research Project, many National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) publications, and all of the government-sponsored research reports now distributed by the Clearinghouse for Federal Scientific and Technical Information. A 1964 study by Jennings Wood identified some 2,000 publications produced outside of the Government Printing Office, and of interest to libraries.⁸ Another partial measure of the volume of material produced and distributed outside of the depository system is the fact that the Readex Microprint edition of nondepository publications contained well over 12,000 items for 1967.

Indicative of the limitations of the Government Printing Office (GPO) depository system are the number of more specialized depository systems created by the Federal agencies themselves—the Army Map Service, Geological Survey, Census Bureau, NASA, and the Federal Regional Technical Report Centers are examples. Some of these (the Census Bureau, for example) are intended to supplement the GPO system by providing additional outlets for agency publications, others (the Army Map Service or NASA, as examples) are competitive with the GPO system, since they distribute materials not available to GPO depositories. Some of these specialized depository systems are highly restrictive (there are only eleven Federal Regional Technical Report Centers), while others are quite broad (the Census Bureau has 140 depositories in the United States). Until recently, the Atomic Energy Commission distributed microfiche copies of its reports to 101 depositories in the United States, but in August of 1969, it was announced that this system would be replaced by a subscription service available from a commercial firm.

In addition to these specialized depository systems, of course, the federal government has created a major alternative system for the distribution of government-sponsored research reports: the Clearinghouse for Federal Scientific and Technical Information. Operated by

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the Department of Commerce, the Clearinghouse emphasizes fast, economical distribution of "unclassified" research reports in less than print format (microfiche, offset or electrostatic copies), and utilizes modern computer technology to provide a carefully coordinated set of abstracts and indexes for this material. Until recently, research libraries have had to rely on *U.S. Government Research and Development Reports* or the *FAST Announcement* service as selection and acquisition sources for reports available from the Clearinghouse. In April 1969, however, the Clearinghouse announced a selective microfiche dissemination service which will allow subscribers to receive all or some of several hundred subject or agency categories. During 1969, the Clearinghouse estimates it will distribute over two million copies of some 50,000 reports received from fifty federal agencies.⁹

Aware of the large number of government publications not being made available to depository libraries, thirty-two libraries joined together in 1947 to establish the Documents Expediting Project.¹⁰ With offices in the Library of Congress, the Project is supported by the contributions of the subscribing libraries, which by 1968 had increased to 142. Since the Project has had to discontinue distribution of the Joint Publications Research Service and Cooperative Research Project reports, the most important series now being distributed are the Congressional Committee prints (an estimated 75 percent of those issued are distributed) and the *Foreign Broadcast Daily Reports*. In addition to these publications, an attempt is made to obtain copies of titles selected from *Monthly Catalog* proof slips, and from samples supplied by cooperating agencies. In all, the Project distributed 241,000 items to member libraries in 1968.¹¹

When Congress revised the Depository Law in 1962, in response to many urgent pleas from librarians, it attempted to make these non-GPO publications available to depository libraries. Henceforth to be excluded were only those publications intended "for official use," those of "no public interest or educational value," and those classified "for reasons of national security."¹² Appropriations for the implementation of this part of the Act have been slow in forthcoming, and to date the Superintendent of Documents has only been able to add the non-GPO publications of three agencies to the depository system: those of the Bureau of Census, and of the Departments of Interior and Labor.¹³ No new agencies have been added to this list since 1967, and it appears that implementation of this program is at a standstill.

Recognizing the problems inherent in the implementation of the

Depository Act of 1962, not the least of which is the storage burden imposed on the large research library if the Act were to be fully implemented, several proposals have recently been made which suggest a fresh approach to broadening the depository system.¹⁴ One of these proposals was put forth early in 1967 by a committee of the Association of Research Libraries. This committee suggested that record copies of non-GPO publications be deposited with the Library of Congress and with the Clearinghouse for Federal Scientific and Technical Information, as appropriate, and that microcopies of these publications be made available free of charge to those libraries "with a demonstrated need for them."¹⁵ The first part of this proposal, in regard to the Library of Congress, was implemented by a Bureau of the Budget memorandum in June of 1967.¹⁶ In the following year, the Library of Congress reported receiving 10,000 non-GPO publications, of which 3,637 were found not to be listed in the *Monthly Catalog*.¹⁷ Although a selection of these publications was forwarded for listing in the *Monthly Catalog*, thus insuring their inclusion in the Readex Microprint edition of non-depository publications, the suggested free distribution of microcopies remains to be implemented.

It is clear that a research library which attempts to build a comprehensive collection of United States government publications, or even an exhaustive one in a subject area, will need to go far beyond the confines of the present depository system. At the very least, such a library will need to subscribe to the Readex Microprint edition of non-depository publications (at approximately \$2,500 a year), to seek designation as a specialized depository from a number of agencies, to subscribe to the new microfiche dissemination service of the Clearinghouse (at an estimated \$15,000 a year for comprehensive coverage, excluding AEC reports), and to make an undetermined contribution to the Documents Expediting Project. Considering the costs incurred in the processing, housing and servicing of large collections of government publications,¹⁸ it is not surprising to find the larger research libraries suggesting that the original intent of the depository program, to provide convenient access to the totality of government publication, be carried out.

For the research library concerned with the building of back files of United States government documents, or with the acquisition of replacement or security copies, a number of important retrospective series are available in reprint or microform. In the microform field, Readex Microprint and University Microfilms have been particularly

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active, and such major series as the American State Papers, the Congressional Serial Set (through 1883), and the Congressional debates from the *Annals of Congress* through the *Congressional Record*, are available. Reprints of such basic bibliographical tools as the *Catalog of the Public Documents* (1896-1945), the *Monthly Catalog*, and the *Checklist of United States Public Documents*, are also on the market. As in other fields, the past ten years have witnessed a remarkable growth in both reprinting and microcopying of retrospective materials, and it may be expected that this trend will continue.

Turning to the acquisition of state documents, one finds a picture almost as diverse as the states themselves, although the activities of the American Library Association, the Association of State Libraries, the Library of Congress, and the National Legislative Conference have promoted some standardization of bibliographic control and distribution. About thirty-six states presently issue checklists of their publications.¹⁹ These vary widely in size and scope, from the simple exchange lists issued by some states to the more ambitious and inclusive lists of California, New York, and Louisiana. Supplementing these state lists, of course, is the *Monthly Checklist of State Publications*, which in 1961 covered an estimated 60 percent of current state publishing activity, although a 1969 report states that "a concentrated effort to make the *Checklist* more comprehensive has resulted in an increase each year in the number of titles entered. . . ."²⁰ *The Bulletin of the Public Affairs Information Service*, which includes state documents, is even more selective. Many states now have some centralized distribution agency; most commonly this agency is the State Library. In recent years, an increasing number of states have established depository systems (California, New York, Oregon, and Ohio are examples), but not all are able to offer the full range of government publications, and some are able to designate depositories only within their own state. About twenty-two state libraries report that they can offer documents on exchange to libraries in other states.

Historically, the collected or legislative documents of the several states have constituted an important research resource. The kinds of reports included in these sets, much like the content of the Congressional Serial Set, has been mainly a matter of tradition, and in many cases these reports do not adequately represent the current range of state activities. Rising costs of binding and preparation have caused some states to abandon this series, and one state (Massachusetts) has recently announced its intention to distribute microcopy in

place of its printed collected documents. A highly select group of state publications is available from Falls City Microcards, comprising those titles listed in the quarterly *Legislative Research Checklist* of the Council of State Governments. As the activities of state government expand, and as the variety and importance of their publications increases, it will also become increasingly important for research libraries to promote the development of a national program for the bibliographic control and dissemination of state publications.

In the field of foreign documents, as with other government publications, the problem of keeping up with the seemingly kaleidoscopic changes in agency names, and of identifying agency addresses and sources of supply, is acute. Helpful in this respect are the *Europa Yearbook*, the *International Year-book and Statesmen's Who's Who*, the *Political Handbook and Atlas of the World*, and the UNESCO *Handbook on the International Exchange of Publications*. The latter provides the names and addresses of bibliographic and exchange centers for each country, from whom additional information may often be obtained. Most countries include government publications only as part of a more general national bibliography, although some (the *Bibliographie de la France* and the *Indian National Bibliography* are examples) list official publications separately in a supplement. Sixteen countries publish separate documents lists; outstanding in coverage and currency are those issued by Great Britain, Canada, and Israel. A useful list of current bibliographies of official publications has recently been prepared by James B. Childs.²¹ Another helpful guide to sources of information about foreign government documents, with brief descriptions of some of the basic publications of each country, is given in *Etude des Bibliographies Courantes des Publications Officielles Nationales*, published by UNESCO in 1958, and currently being revised.

Government documents and other non-trade publications, because of all the special problems inherent in their acquisition, may, in fact, be more costly to acquire than publications in the commercial book trade. But the unique character of a research collection is often dependent upon the effectiveness of its program for procuring this type of publication. The high cost of such acquisitions provides only an additional argument for the further development of cooperative acquisitions programs and for the further delineation of subject responsibilities among research libraries.

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