



Trends Abroad: Western Europe

ROBERT COLLISON

GEOGRAPHICAL FACTORS have a powerful influence on intellectual freedom: where several countries are huddled together it is difficult to maintain any kind of effective control without first establishing a common policy. Thus, an overnight train in Western Europe will cross two or three frontiers and the traveller will, unwittingly, transgress the laws of one or more countries by carrying with him material which, freely bought in the first, is forbidden in the second or third. The absurdity of such a situation—whose untenable nature has been underlined by the growth of air travel—has done much to impose a pragmatic attitude to the solution of problems of intellectual control, though progress in some countries is surprisingly slow.

Geography is again the key to some of the variations in treatment within a country. In two areas of any nation—the metropolitan or heavily-populated districts and the port areas—one can usually expect a more permissive attitude than prevails elsewhere within its boundaries. In both areas the temporary stay of visitors from other parts of the world induces the adoption of more liberal attitudes. These attitudes are influenced by the belief that the visitors can have little influence on the country's outlook and by commercial considerations. In addition, the presence of large populations makes the maintenance of strict controls more difficult. This policy may also be reinforced by a feeling that what visitors buy and read is their own concern. Thus, London's Soho, with its striptease shows, its sleazy hole-in-the-corner fly-by-night bookshops full of erotic literature and its general air of corruption would be hard to parallel in other parts of Britain, apart from the dock areas of the largest ports. In a similar way, the kiosks of Copenhagen, with their picture books openly displayed to passers-by, and the sex shops of Sweden, are part of the phenomena of ports that

Robert Collison is Head, Reference Department, University Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

are also capitals, and one would not expect to find their equivalent in rural areas in the country. It can be assumed, therefore, that the degree of sophistication of a given area will help to determine what is available and what is permissible, and thereby introduces a double standard of behavior which is unconsciously accepted by the great majority of the population who, in any case, appear to expect the big city to be wicked and to include more than its share of crime and corruption.

Intellectual freedom covers such a wide area that it is somewhat astonishing to find so large a proportion intimately associated with printed matter. While a man may make many outrageous statements in the comparative safety of his own home or in his restricted circle of acquaintances, his publication of the same statements in printed form may bring heavy punishment on his own head and on the heads of those who have aided him (by printing, distribution, etc.) in the publication of his views. There is, of course, much justice in this, for it is clear that effective control over the right distribution of printed material is impossible, and that no one can insure that an item, once published, may not fall into the hands of people for whom it was not intended. As the Working Party convened by the Chairman of the Arts Council of Great Britain to consider the obscenity laws stated in their 1969 report: "We recognize, however, that it is reasonable to protect individuals who may be affronted by offensive display or behavior in public places."¹ At the same time they recommended that the Obscene Publications Acts of 1959 and 1964 should be repealed for a trial period of five years.

Thus Sweden's sex shops are unobtrusive, and the kiosks of Denmark which were so noticeable in 1968, were far less obvious in the following year. Again, in the Federal Republic of Germany a law concerning the dissemination of writings endangering young people has been in operation for many years.² An official center scrutinizes literary production in West Germany and recommends, on the advice of competent authorities, whether or not individual works should be placed on a list indicating that they infringe the bounds of reasonable treatment of such subjects as morals, crime, race hatred, glorification of war, etc. Should they be so indicated, the consequences for both authors and publishers concerned could be considerable.

In Western Europe the public attitudes to questions of obscenity and pornography remain confused. Thus the French Ministry of the Interior has lifted the ban on Henry Miller's *Sexus* for people over the

Western Europe

age of eighteen. Nevertheless, a group of French publishers was still protesting against other examples of book banning in 1969. And in Belgium, the tendency recently has been for the police to enforce existing censorship laws more vigorously than hitherto. But the Danes continue to show the way toward an adult attitude on these thorny issues: in September 1968, H. H. Brydenscholt, of the Danish Ministry of Justice, pointed out that the demand for written pornography increased immediately after the legalization of its distribution—and then fell off sharply. He therefore felt that if pictorial obscenity were similarly legalized, the same would happen. But the showing of obscene motion pictures should be restricted to people over the age of sixteen.

A recorded analysis of erotic publications issued in Denmark shows that the Danes rely heavily on English-language sources.³ For example, two series begun in 1968 include translations of the following:

Sex i Vor Tid

1. Benjamin Morse. *The Lesbian*
2. Benjamin Morse. *The Sexual Revolution*
3. L. T. Woodward. *Sadism*
4. L. T. Woodward. *Sex and the Divorced Woman*
5. Bryan Magee. *One in Twenty*
6. Benjamin Morse. *The Sexual Deviate*

Sex-Bøgerne

1. Peter Jason. *Unfaithful*
2. Ace Etlar. *Virgin Territory*
3. Peter Jason. *Wayward*
4. Robert Desmond. *Professional Charmer*
5. Winifred Drake. *Tender was my Flesh*
6. Angela Pearson. *The Whipping-Post*

No more titles have been issued in the first series, but the second has now reached over thirty titles and continues to rely on English-language sources. The Porno-Serien casts its net wider and includes some of the native product, but the mixture is still the same—whips and governesses, slaves and cruel countesses—in a list of titles that now exceeds fifty.

The problem of plays and motion pictures is in fact closely connected with that of printed material, and it is interesting to examine what Western Europe has been doing about the former in recent times. Thus Irish Catholic priests are now allowed—for the first time

in one hundred years—to attend professional stage productions in Ireland. But almost at the same time, Italy's Catholic Film Board banned all Catholics from seeing Pasolini's *Teorema*. And in France, all those under eighteen were forbidden to see such films as *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Benjamin*, etc. In Scotland *Ulysses* (the film) was banned in eight towns. This film was also banned in Ireland, even though the book is freely available there. Although there is no pre-censorship of films in Belgium—except for a commission which decides what films should not be seen by people under sixteen—the Brussels police confiscated the Swedish film *I am Curious (Yellow)*. *Rosemary's Baby* suffered a fifteen-second cut in Britain. And in Rome some scenes in *Galileo* of the astronomer being burnt at the stake were censored on the grounds that they were “too violent.” In any case, this film is banned in Italy to anyone under eighteen.

The Greek system appears to be one of the best balanced methods of dealing with a complicated situation: scenes of love and passion are permitted in films, because they are considered to be showing natural emotions. On the other hand, minors are banned from seeing films evoking violence and terror, and there are heavy punishments for the cinema managers, parents, and escorts concerned in any infringement of this law. Nevertheless, the same country has been responsible for the banning of Melina Mercouri's records, because they are critical of the Greek régime, and Greece's stormy history of press censorship in recent years is well known to the world at large.

In principle Britain has at last abolished stage censorship after at least three hundred years of fighting between the Lord Chancellor and the public. But, as in many other countries, the struggle over stage representations has not been confined to questions of obscenity. Political and religious issues have frequently caused controversy. Thus the French Ministry of Culture ordered the state-subsidized Théâtre National Populaire to stop the production of a play which attacked General Franco. In several countries the indignant demands for the suppression of Rolf Hochhuth's *Soldiers* shows that, whatever the law, there will always be attempts to control the more extreme or partisan performances on the stage, and—as in the case of obscenity—the instigators of such action are convinced they act from the best of motives, which they would probably interpret as “in the public interest.”

Political censorship is not always effective. In most European countries the press sooner or later oversteps the mark and then there is

Western Europe

an attempt to prevent a particular issue of a journal or newspaper from reaching the bookstalls. *L'Express* in France, and *Der Spiegel** in Germany are only two in a long list of periodicals that have occasionally fallen foul of the authorities. Attempts to suppress issues of journals are, however, difficult to make 100 percent effective. For example, in the case of one journal which, several years ago, published a portrait on its front page which was subsequently withdrawn, most copies reached the public with half the front page left blank. What had been overlooked, however, was the custom of putting copies for readers in a neighboring country on the overnight train, and these of course included the forbidden photograph. Though throughout Scandinavia there is usually complete freedom of religious and political expression, the Danish authorities in late 1969 seized two left-wing periodicals, arrested seven young activists, and accused a wartime resistance leader (who is now an editor of a Copenhagen newspaper) of publishing secret military information. The latest issue of *Vietnam Solidarity* and the matrix of a forthcoming issue of the left-wing fortnightly magazine *Politisk Revy* were also seized by the police. In Britain, an independent television station's recorded interview with the commander-in-chief of NATO's allied forces in Northern Europe became the subject of controversy about the same time that the television company concerned was asked to destroy the film on security grounds. This, some felt, was a red herring used to conceal a move to suppress a document that presented NATO's real position in the world rather too frankly.

The extent to which control of what the public sees on television may be thought necessary was illustrated in an address in 1969 to the Royal Television Society by Lord Aylestone, Chairman of the Independent Television Authority. Lord Aylestone pointed out that a conscious choice was made by people using theaters, cinemas, or libraries, but that this was not completely true for television. Moreover, television was essentially a reporting and dramatic medium, both aspects being always about the unusual so that "some people fear that it is the very quantity of television, the constant restatement of the abnormal, that presents its greatest problem and its greatest danger." Thus there was an element of common sense in the view that if they went on saying that all teenagers were hippies and sexually promiscuous, then some might think that such behavior was socially acceptable. But it was just not common sense to suggest that the violence in society would be measurably decreased if everyone gave up

telling on television the sort of tales that have been told since *Beowulf*, and independent television was helping to turn away from violence by dealing not with violent crime itself but with its solution. Thus, compared with its sister arts, television treats sex and violence in a restrained way. In this connection it is interesting to see that the Pope has proposed to the General Assembly of Italian Roman Catholic Journalists that there should be a code of behavior for newspaper editors and publishers which would reduce the amount of news about crime reported in the world's press.

An unusual sideline of the question under discussion is the problem of the invasion of people's privacy. Questions were asked in the British Parliament in 1969 concerning the unsolicited circulation by a provincial publisher of leaflets advertising a book. The Director of Public Prosecutions had ruled that the circular did not offer the Obscene Publications Act or any other legislation. A member of Parliament pointed out that the leaflet in question had caused offense and embarrassment to many of his constituents, particularly elderly people who did not "share the same degree of sophistication on worldly matters as the Director of Public Prosecutions." It seems therefore that, the British, like North Americans, must resign themselves to having their mail boxes increasingly include material which they have not requested.

In 1966, Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, declared there would be no more editions of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (last issued in 1948) and that, as such, it remains an historical document. The Catholic Church⁵ still claims, however, the authority to prohibit a book when it constitutes a general danger to the faith or morals of Catholics. The extent to which such a policy can lead a country is illustrated in North Brabant⁶ where the number of Catholics is higher than elsewhere in the Netherlands. Breda is the town with the largest non-Catholic minority in that province, and "we [therefore] get the strange situation of four separate library systems centred on the city. There is the general public library . . . ; then there is the Roman Catholic library for the city; thirdly there is the general county library; and finally, the Roman Catholic county library." Then there is the Catholic Library Association in Germany which issues a printed catalog of books in which some items are marked as not suitable for the general public. This paternalistic approach to library administration is, of course, not confined to any one country or faith, but it can earn bitter resentment, particularly from the younger readers in the community.

Western Europe

The trend in Western Europe appears headed toward complete intellectual freedom because the opportunities for sidestepping any controls and the ability to compare first hand any inequalities of treatment make any attempts at a stricter regime not only absurd but also impossible to maintain consistently. The leader in the field—despite recent Danish moves—has for many years been France, the very country that in the days of Bayle and Voltaire forced some of its best writers and thinkers to live in exile. It is France that has permitted the publication of Joyce and Henry Miller in English, and of so many Russian, Spanish, and German works; that has allowed the establishment of so many émigré societies; and that has maintained the free expression of the film. Paris has proved a Mecca for the avant-garde of Asia, Africa, the Americas and from the more repressive governments of Europe. In doing so it has performed an extra function—that of bringing together creative personalities of very divergent backgrounds, and has thus facilitated the international flow and exchange of ideas, just as The Hague and Amsterdam did at the turn of the seventeenth century. It is curious to think that only the establishment of a United States of Europe could produce an administration strong enough to reduce the present state of intellectual freedom in Western Europe, but the maturity of the nations concerned is more likely to feel in any case that good taste and tolerance are the best guides to action in these matters.

References

1. *Times* (London), July 16, 1968, pp. 1, 9.
2. Baumgärtner, Alfred Clemens. "Jugendgefährdung durch Literatur?" *Bücherei und Bildung; Fachzeitschrift des Vereins deutschen Volksbibliothekare e. V. und des deutschen Büchereiverbandes*, 20:316-21, June 1968.
3. *Dansk bogfortegnelse årskatalog, 1967*, København, G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1968, pp. 256-57, 287; 1968, pp. 287-88, 319-20, 1969.
4. Götz, Günter. "Beschlagnahme, Einziehung und Unbrauchbarmachung von Druckwerken und die öffentlichen Bibliotheken," *Zeitschrift für Bibliothekswesen und Bibliographie*, 13:137-48, 1966.
5. Dee, D. "Index of Prohibited Books," *New Catholic Encyclopedia; An International Work of Reference on the Teachings, History, Organization, and Activities of the Catholic Church, and on all Institutions, Religions, Philosophies, and Scientific and Cultural Developments Affecting the Catholic Church from its Beginning to the Present*. Vol 7. Prepared by an editorial staff at the Catholic University of America. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1967, pp. 434-35.
6. Harrison, K. C. "That Waterland of Dutchmen," *Library Association Record*, 66:193-98, May 1964.