Introduction

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This issue of Library Trends is an analysis of the fairly large-scale overseas book and library assistance programs in which the American library profession has participated during the last twenty-five years. These activities have involved sizeable sums of money, and the energy and expertise of literally scores of librarians and non-librarians on a global basis.

Since its inception as a professional organization, the library movement in the United States has been interested in international librarianship. Activity in this area before World War II was generally confined to donated book programs for war-ravaged libraries, cooperation with library associations, and consultations on problems relating to classification and cataloging—much of which was institutionalized through the American Library Association.

The American library presence abroad has increased in scope and dimension since 1945. Direct assistance has involved gifts of millions of books, funding for library buildings, aid in evolving national library plans, establishment of library education programs, and a wide variety of other library- and book-related projects, financed by both the private and public sectors. Indirect assistance, less visible but of considerable impact, has come from the presence of army and United States Information Service (USIS) libraries overseas as well as from the far-flung international activities of the Library of Congress and the library associations.

In aggregate, the papers which follow do not reveal the full extent of American library efforts abroad. They do, however, detail the various broad avenues of approach which have been traversed in rendering assistance.

The rationale of book donations to individual as well as to institutional recipients, the appropriateness of the gift books for educational, informational and social purposes are discussed extensively by Paul

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Bixler. The efforts of the U.S. book industry to make books available, particularly in developing countries, are admirably summarized by David Kaser.

David G. Donovan has written about the library consultant and the problems with which he is confronted in an alien culture. Robert S. Burgess has critically analyzed representative library education programs financed by federal and private agencies.

The indirect influence created by the presence of U.S. libraries abroad is clearly delineated by A. Elizabeth Schwartz and Joan Collett in their respective chapters on military and USIA libraries. John G. Lorenz and his associates have detailed the ongoing multi-international activities centered in the Library of Congress. Peggy Sullivan has narrated the evolution of the international relations programs of the American Library Association since the end of World War II.

It is clearly evident throughout these papers that overseas book and library activities have peaked and are in decline, due to a loss of funding from foundations and federal agencies. Further, it is evident that these primary underwriters of library aid have funded on an ad hoc basis. Excepting the book activity of the Agency for International Development and the work of the Asia Foundation, no other agencies have given library programs priority as an essential component of educational and economic growth in developing countries.

Two factors have mitigated against the success of library assistance as it relates to developing nations: the absence of a coordinated plan by the funding agencies and the lack of genuine commitment to libraries by the ruling elite in many developing nations. Both foundations and federal agencies have supported duplicate and incongruous programs which have failed to attack basic aspects of national library development. In some instances, short-term programs have created more problems than they have solved. In many of the receiving nations, library development has had to compete with national projects which are considered more urgent and most insistent of quick solution. Library development has been postponed year after year.

Better coordination, from the American end, of future library assistance programs would seem desirable. Perhaps the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on International Educational and Cultural Affairs will, if accepted, lead to a more systematic approach in the future. The subcommittee made five basic recommendations:

1. That there be established within the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the Department of State the position of Library
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Development Planning Officer, staffed by someone with a broad knowledge of modern library practice and practical experience in developing countries.

2. That each agency of the U.S. government which is engaged in the development of education, research, or cultural activities overseas designate, if it has not already done so, a qualified member of its Washington staff at an appropriate level as Library Development Officer.

3. That the service of competent library development officers be made available to the various missions in developing countries in which the United States is interested.

4. That in developing and executing library programs government agencies make greater use of appropriate non-governmental, non-profit agencies such as Franklin Book Programs, the International Relations Office of the American Library Association, and the United States Book Exchange.

5. That U.S. government support of the library and information programs of international organizations such as UNESCO and the OAS be increased.¹

In spite of what may be termed the faults of a too generous nature, the impact of the U.S. presence on library development abroad has been important, though difficult to measure quantitatively. The recipients of library assistance collectively agree to the importance of U.S. assistance. Had it not been for American benefactions, many claim there could have been no library development in a great number of countries.

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