



# The Role of the National Bibliographic Centre

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## THE NATIONAL LIBRARY AND ITS BIBLIOGRAPHIC FUNCTIONS: AN ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEM

AT THE APEX of the library structure in many countries of the world stands a national library, distinguished by the dignity of its building, the richness of its collections, the wealth of its resources, and the quality of its scholarship. There are national libraries with historical foundations dating back centuries, even to the fifteenth (France) and the sixteenth (Austria) centuries, and whose origins reflect the early enthusiasm for learning of a prince, emperor, or president. Other national libraries, including those in Mexico, Venezuela and Belgium, were established in that enlightened period of national liberation, the nineteenth century. In the past thirty years new national libraries have been created, like those of the nineteenth century, as "an expression of emergent nationalism . . . in the wake of a series of 'national' type institutions like a national archives, a national theatre, or a national museum."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the national library has been regarded as an institution familiar but possibly aloof; as a symbol of old-style scholarship and of a more leisurely way of life; and as the pinnacle of, yet somewhat unrelated to, the national library scene below. This was the old-fashioned portrait which is now outdated. In the past twenty years, the image has changed as dramatically as have the role and activities of the national library. Yet, it is still surprising that the role and functions of the national library have only recently come under scrutiny and analysis; only in the past ten years have the national libraries in a number of countries emerged from traditional dignity and obscure scholarship to become leaders in national library development. If this is an accurate reflection of changes in librarians' attitudes and in

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library technology, it is also revealing to note the chronology of analysis and its documentation. Investigation of national libraries originated with *Library Trends* in 1955, but the emphasis then was on resources rather than on activities: “. . . maintained primarily at public cost with funds allotted from, and disbursed by, national treasuries.”<sup>2</sup>

The Symposium on National Libraries in Europe, held in Vienna in 1958, inaugurated the study of the role of the national library and expounded on its functions and its duties. In his working paper for the symposium, Frank Francis of the British Museum expressed its basic purpose and in so doing defined “the national library in any country as the library which has the duty of collecting and preserving for posterity the written production of that country.”<sup>3</sup> All other duties stem from that basis.

Nearly twenty years later that duty remains fundamental. Indeed, recent emphasis has been to strengthen that basis, for the national library is now seen as the key to the management of “national bibliographic control”—a rephrasing of Francis’s definition. The national library is expected to watch over, collect, preserve, record, and advertise book and nonbook materials which make up the national imprint.

From the examinations of the national library in the issue of *Library Trends* and at the symposium in Vienna emerged an analysis both of the functions already being performed by some national libraries and of the other activities which clearly should come within their scope. The following conclusions of the symposium are relevant in consideration of the present concept of national bibliographic control:

It is the responsibility of the national library to acquire and conserve the whole of the national production of printed material . . . and it should be responsible for co-ordinating efforts to obtain the foreign literature the country requires. The national library should promote the adoption in its own country of common rules for the compilation of catalogues. The national library is responsible for the bibliographical services of its own country . . . to undertake the production of current national bibliographies.<sup>4</sup>

More probing and analysis from dedicated national and university librarians followed. Significant was the paper by Kenneth W. Humphries prepared for the 1964 International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) General Council, in which he identified fifteen functions which the national library should perform.<sup>5</sup> Three

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years later in a report on university libraries in the United Kingdom, a chapter devoted to the national library began:

It has been extremely difficult for us to relate the position of the university library to the national library scene for a variety of reasons of which the fundamental one is that there is no true apex to the library system of the country. In comparison with the organisation of libraries in other countries which have a national library, Britain is especially wanting in this respect.

The functions were then set out, the first six being the "fundamental duties":

- (a) The outstanding and central collection of a nation's literature.
- (b) The most important collection of books received under legal deposit or under the terms of the Copyright Act.
- (c) The fullest coverage of foreign literature.
- (d) The publication of the national bibliography.
- (e) The national bibliographical information centre.
- (f) The publication of catalogues of material in the National Library and in the country's libraries.<sup>6</sup>

Another seven functions, it was agreed, could be carried out by the national library or, if necessary, could be undertaken by other bibliographic agencies. These functions have been accepted and repeated in countries all over the world as national libraries have been created or restructured to meet new demands of information and service. These fundamental functions are cited in numerous reports of national library commissions or international experts. For example, the *Resumé and Recommendations* of the National Seminar on Library Development in Pakistan notes them as "the modern standard of a national library," but concludes that by these criteria, the national library of Pakistan "seems to be non-existent at the moment."<sup>7</sup>

Acceptance of these functions bestows on the national library the additional role of leader of the national library community: it should give guidance and assistance, experiment, undertake research, and be actively committed to supporting the national library community by interpreting its needs and relating them to the rest of the world. The national library is therefore visualised as having a double role: (1) as the apex of the national library structure, and (2) as the head of the national library system. In one sense, this dual role is exemplified in the six fundamental functions. The first three duties are concerned with the national library per se, the physical objects or "information

carriers" that make up its collections, and users of those collections; the other three functions are devoted to the recording and describing of information carriers. Together, these aspects make up the whole of national bibliographic control. Lawrence G. Livingston, Program Officer of the Council on Library Resources, expressed the concept geometrically in a paper prepared for the 1974 U.S. Conference on National Bibliographic Control:

National Bibliographic Control can be considered as a continuum of parallel lines, one line being drawn by the item of literature itself as it progresses from the mind of the author. . . . The other line is followed by the surrogate for the item, its bibliographic record. The first line is straightforward. . . . It is the line of path followed by the surrogate and the surrogate itself which is of vital concern.<sup>8</sup>

The national library is concerned with both the "item of literature" in its physical form and its "surrogate" or bibliographic record. The functions are different for each, and it is an organisational matter to realize how best they can be performed with a minimum of duplicated effort within one institution.

As the key to the improvement and development of national bibliographic control, the national library can also be considered as the national component in the international communications system which we define as Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC). Again, the national library is concerned internationally with both the item and its surrogate, the bibliographic record. The third function of the national library, noted earlier, is to maintain the country's "fullest coverage of foreign literature." In order to do this successfully, access to the bibliographic records of publications of other countries is required. Advances in library technology in the past ten years offer new possibilities: first, in rapid access to those records, and second, in simplified integration of the records themselves into national catalogues. The development of library mechanisation has widened the library's horizons: it is now possible to imagine a network of mechanised national library systems using the same standards of bibliographic recording and rapid exchange of records. This is the basis of UBC: to avoid duplication of effort internationally by recording information in accordance with international standards for easy acceptance in other library systems.

The administrative and organisational problem is how to create a unit within a national library that can handle bibliographic records in

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both a national and international context. The solution offered is the national bibliographic centre:

It is therefore suggested that the national component of the UBC system should normally be the national library receiving all types of published documentary material by legal deposit and hence maintaining the national collection; and that within the national library the functions relating to national bibliographic control should be performed by an organizational unit, the national bibliographic agency, which will make the authoritative bibliographic record for each item added to that collection, and will carry out all the functions associated with the production of the record: that is, produce the national bibliography and maintain authority files of national authors' names.<sup>9</sup>

(For "national bibliographic agency," read "national bibliographic centre." For some purely terminological reason, *agency* has slipped in popularity; perhaps because it has noninstitutional connotations, *centre* has prevailed.) At the Liber Meeting on Co-operative Cataloguing, Strasbourg, 1972, participants were concerned with the demands of European research libraries in acquiring material from other countries. The same solution was presented:

Each country should have an official Bibliographic Centre which would be responsible for compiling and making available a complete machine readable record of the country's own output of publications, and for obtaining and distributing within its own country information from the corresponding records of other countries.<sup>10</sup>

If the national library is at the apex of a country's library system, then in terms of its national bibliographic control, the national bibliographic centre is its nexus.<sup>11</sup> It looks inward to provide a service to the country's libraries; it looks outward to interpret for and serve as provider from the outside world.

### AN OUTLINE OF SOME EXISTING NATIONAL SOLUTIONS

The national library has been defined and its importance stated as the key to national bibliographic control, and as the national component of the international communications system concept of UBC. There is no insistence, however, that there be one model of a national

library, or that its bibliographic services be performed only by a national bibliographic centre. The objectives of national bibliographic control are the same in any country, but differing national literary and publishing histories have resulted in different bibliographic traditions—and consequently, in the creation of varying types of institutions to carry out bibliographic tasks. It is of primary importance that the functions be carried out, whatever the institutional pattern of a national library system. In presenting a structure of national library and subordinate national bibliographic centre, however, we are suggesting an organisational arrangement which appears to offer maximum efficiency and minimum duplication.

In considering the relationship of national to universal bibliographic control, it is revealing to note the changes in organisational structure that are now taking place in a number of countries with firmly established bibliographic traditions and long-established institutions. One of the most recent is the creation within the Bibliothèque nationale (Paris) of a new organisational unit, the Centre bibliographique national, which will take on functions hitherto performed by departments of the Bibliothèque nationale, including production of the national bibliography.<sup>12</sup> In the United Kingdom, following the analysis of the Parry report,<sup>13</sup> came the Dainton report recommending the establishment of a national library.<sup>14</sup> The creation of the British Library from six existing institutions followed; within the British Library is the Bibliographic Services Division, which includes among its functions those of a national bibliographic centre.<sup>15</sup>

Awareness of a vacuum in the existing pattern has led to examination and rethinking in the United States:

Except for the Library of Congress, the United States does not possess an official national bibliographic center to coordinate the processing and distribution of standard bibliographic records for the use of all libraries and information centers. The current complex pattern of bibliographic services consists of a multiplicity of organizations, in the public and private sectors, providing a variety of products and services. National bibliographic control is needed to identify items of recorded information in all media, to provide intellectual access to each such item of information, and to standardize the processing and communication of relevant data.<sup>16</sup>

The proposition has been put to the American library community: Can the library which was specifically established to serve Congress take on officially the role which it has already been performing? The

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Library of Congress has, both de facto and in its relationships to the international library community, been acting as the national library, and its Processing Department has been carrying out the functions of a national bibliographic centre.<sup>17</sup> Following the discussions at the conference in April 1974<sup>18</sup> has been the establishment of the Advisory Group on National Bibliographic Control with the formation of working groups to locate and solve particular bibliographic problems (e.g., journal articles, technical reports, and name authority files). Each project is conceived as "efforts leading towards the development of some of the building blocks from which ultimately will evolve a national system."<sup>19</sup> The advisory group further stated that: "The Library of Congress is the logical agency to become the national bibliographic node in the evolving national network for libraries and information science."<sup>20</sup>

Bibliographic traditions and established institutions can sometimes prevail over the simple and straightforward solution, however. In the Netherlands, the search to establish a new national bibliography—the current bibliography has been produced commercially under the title of its publisher *Brinkman's Cumulative Catalogus*—has indicated its establishment within the framework of a national bibliographic centre, and the concurrent introduction of deposit laws. Administrative problems have unfortunately impeded the proposals, but in 1974 the Ministry of Science and Education provided financial support to conduct preliminary studies to determine both the role of a Dutch bibliographic centre and to which existing institution it should be attached. It has proven to be difficult to convince the publishing and library community of the value of a system of legal deposit when it has managed for so long without one.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, discussions are underway to improve the quality of the entries in *Brinkman's*.

In newer countries a conflict can arise because of demands on the national library to extend its functions to include those usually undertaken by public libraries. The national library may be as new as the national library system; the emphasis on it may thus be not as a library of "last resort," but how its creation can assist local libraries: "The greater association of the national library with the development of public library services, hitherto poorly developed, would be a logical development in Southeast Asian countries and should be actively pursued."<sup>22</sup> Under community pressure, the national library's commitment to national and international bibliographic control may be whittled away and the production of the national bibliography given low priority in staffing and services. A volume recording 1972 im-

prints, if it appears in 1976, may be a fine retrospective reference tool, but it is of little value as an acquisition and cataloguing tool. The solution is simple: "The charge that national libraries of this nature do not function effectively, either as national or as public libraries, could be overcome simply through improved staffing and finance, without which both aspects of service would function below par even if kept separate."<sup>23</sup>

By contrast, the establishment of a professional unit undertaking the functions of a national bibliographic centre may precede the establishment of a national library; it may even be considered as one means of forcing a government's dilatory hand. For example, librarians of the four English-speaking countries in the Caribbean reached agreement in 1974 to establish national bibliographies and to carry out other bibliographic services. In Guyana, the National Library (previously the Public Library) was already fulfilling this task; in the others, the new functions were accepted by libraries which, although designated as national libraries, had not officially been given the necessary resources.<sup>24</sup> New and enterprising is the proposal made by a group of Kenyan librarians to establish a national bibliographic centre before and in lieu of the formation of a national library. It would perforce have to be an independent unit under the auspices of the Kenyan Library Association. From its inception, however, it should seek government endorsement, if not government finance, in order to fit easily into a national library plan at some later stage.<sup>25</sup>

Just as national libraries differ in history and administrative structure, so do the units that undertake bibliographic functions. In Copenhagen, for example, the Kongelige Bibliotek (Royal Library) has been receiving Danish books by deposit law since 1697; Denmark's Royal Library and the Universitetsbiblioteket (University Library) are organized as one administrative unit under the Office of the National Librarian. The Danish national bibliography, however, is prepared and published by the Bibliotekscentralen (Danish Library Bureau) in cooperation with the Royal Library and a private publisher. Other functions of the Bibliotekscentralen focus on public libraries and include supplying furniture and equipment. The Bibliotekscentralen has been producing the national bibliography in mechanised form since January 1976, but it is not yet certain if the other functions of the national bibliographic centre will be carried out by the automation department of the Royal Library, or by some new unit which will combine with the Bibliotekscentralen.<sup>26</sup>

In other countries tradition has divided collections according to

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type; the functions of the national library consequently may be split among different libraries. This situation immediately presents problems in the national and international functioning of the bibliographic centre. In the German Democratic Republic, for example, the Deutsche Bücherei in Leipzig collects German-language materials from all sources and in all subjects, and the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in Berlin performs its function of collecting foreign literature in all subjects. Various series of the national bibliography are produced by the Deutsche Bücherei; thus the link between national and international exchange is not immediately apparent. In the Federal Republic of Germany there are three major libraries: the Deutsche Bibliothek at Frankfurt-am-Main, the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin, and the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich. The Deutsche Bibliothek concentrates on German-language material and publishes the national bibliography, thus serving as the national bibliographic agency for German-language bibliographic records and as a receiving centre for records produced in other countries.<sup>27</sup>

The acquisition of foreign literature in Europe is extensive, particularly for the smaller countries which depend on English-language publications from the United States or the United Kingdom for literature in some subject fields. In Denmark, for example, a country with a long tradition of using literature from other countries, the annual book production is about 5,000 titles, and the number of overseas monographic publications received yearly in the Royal Library is about 40,000. Annual book production in Switzerland is about 8,000 titles, and the National Library aims to acquire annually from other countries more than 43,000 monographs and nearly 6,000 periodicals.<sup>28</sup> Sweden expects in the near future to make use of the tapes recording American, British, French and German publications and thus to have available the records of some 75 percent of the overseas acquisitions.<sup>29</sup> If there are a number of libraries within a country that are building special collections of foreign literature, it would be even more essential that some national bibliographic centre act for all the libraries in obtaining records.

#### A MODEL SOLUTION: THE NATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHIC CENTRE AND ITS FUNCTIONS

If the primary purpose of the national library is to build and conserve the national collection, the primary objective of the national bibliographic centre is to produce the comprehensive bibliographic

records of the national imprint. All of its other activities evolve from that basis. To perform this primary task, the first requirements of the centre are:

1. To obtain access to the physical items themselves (books, serials, etc.). It is legitimate to assume that the entries in the national bibliography are created from the items themselves, not from information found on book jackets, publishers' lists or advance notices. (Hence, the advantage of the national bibliographic centre's attachment to the national library is that the items deposited by law can be shelved for readers after they have been described.)
2. To establish accepted standards for making the comprehensive bibliographic record, standards both for the content of the record and for the physical forms in which it appears.

These requirements have two implications: (1) the development and acceptance of national cataloguing rules which will prevail throughout the country, and (2) if the record is to have exchange value, some international basis for national cataloguing codes. At the moment the situation is complex and far from perfect, but not unworkable. Although no international code exists, most of the national and multinational codes in use are based on the Paris Principles<sup>30</sup> and many have incorporated accepted international practices such as the International Standard Bibliographic Description for Monographic Publications (ISBD(M)).<sup>31</sup>

Bibliographic records more often appear in the form of entries in issues of a printed national bibliography, proof slips or catalogue cards, or in machine-readable forms such as computer tapes. Printed national bibliographies vary in style, size and layout as much as do national imprints and national resources. Nevertheless, if the style and content of the entries satisfy international and national requirements, *then those printed issues are acceptable whatever their form.*

For catalogue cards there is already an internationally accepted standard for size. More important is the possibility in the future of making bibliographic records in machine-readable form in accordance with accepted international standards; the developing network of mechanised national library systems is working on some of the problems that must be solved for its effective operation. The draft of the international communications format (UNIMARC) through which exchange can be made is in its final stages,<sup>32</sup> while national processing formats are operational in a number of countries.

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From the primary function of the national bibliographic centre, it is apparent that other tasks should be undertaken as natural corollaries. First (because it follows so closely from the preparation of the bibliographic record) is the maintenance of the authority list of national authors' names. In the United States, one working group has been specifically assigned the task of working out the format for an authority list file.<sup>33</sup> In the Netherlands, consideration is being given to a numeric coding device which will be allocated to each author; maintenance of this device will be one of the functions of the new bibliographic centre when it is established.<sup>34</sup>

The national bibliographic centre is best equipped when making the record to ascertain the author's requirements with regard to name usage: this emphasises the basic contention that each country has the knowledge to deal best with its authors' names, whether corporate or personal, and that such an operation in a country where name patterns are fluid can in itself have a standardising influence. Experience has shown the problems at the international level of trying to establish and maintain large-scale authority lists (for example, the International Nuclear Information Systems' preparation and use of its lists of corporate bodies<sup>35</sup>), and it is recognised that each country can best decide the definitive form for its own organisations. In some countries—Singapore is one example—national libraries have already produced authoritative lists of such bodies. At present, however, there is much national variation in determining forms of corporate body names as presented in bibliographic records; acceptance of the simple recommendations made by Verona<sup>36</sup> could help to form an international basis for future national decisions.

One unit of the national bibliographic centre can be the centre for the registration of serials as the national contributing organ of the International Serials Data System (ISDS). The majority of the national serial centres already established are within national libraries and specifically are within their bibliographic divisions. Responsibilities of this unit are both national and international in nature: (1) to record new serials for the national bibliography, and (2) to report new titles to the ISDS centre in Paris. Similarly, the national bibliographic centre can house the national International Standard Book Number (ISBN) agency. The use of ISBN is not yet worldwide, depending as it does on the existence of an organized book trade, but its value to library operations is revealed by the fact that eleven national libraries house national ISBN agencies.<sup>37</sup> Inclusion of the ISBN as an essential element in bibliographic records is likely to enhance its use, and

may also encourage the spread of national agencies in national libraries.

Cataloguing-In-Publication (CIP) schemes are underway in a number of countries and in experimental form in others. The basis for these schemes is the demand for speed in producing bibliographic records. It is natural that CIP operations should take place within the national bibliographic centre as part of the cataloguing process.

The function of maintaining national union catalogues has long been carried out conscientiously by national libraries in a number of countries. Essentially, this is a national service relating to national bibliographic control, not so much in the location of holdings but rather in its identification of items which, for a variety of reasons, have not been recorded in the national bibliography. As a retrospective record of national publications and national holdings, its value is immense, but maintenance has been a physical labour that has been proving impossible to perform satisfactorily. There are two possibilities for future improvement. The first possibility is that increased use of national records (i.e., the national bibliographic centre's provision of a centralized cataloguing service) may bring about less variation in incorporating entries. The second possibility is more encouraging from the housekeeping point of view: if union catalogue records can be presented in machine-readable form, the burden of maintenance will be alleviated. The national authority list can also contribute significantly in standardising entries.<sup>38</sup>

Another activity within the province of the national bibliographic centre is the maintenance of the office of deposited publications (the "Copyright Office"). If it is economical to make the description of a publication immediately after its deposit and registration, the national bibliographic centre could supervise the deposit office and, given the necessary instruments, undertake enforcement operations. In many countries, revision of legal deposit is being considered; new laws may strengthen enforcement provisions, as well as extend the range of material to be deposited.<sup>39</sup>

It is apparent from this outline that the national bibliographic centre, if it is to undertake its primary functions and to perform its corollary roles, has another basic requirement: professional expertise and adequate staff and technological resources. The staff of the national bibliographic centre plays an important role nationally in activities relating to cataloguing and classifying. This role consists of: (1) providing leadership in experiment and research in mechanisation, (2) promoting cooperation with publishers, and (3) ensuring

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awareness of what is happening internationally in order to be able to interpret locally decisions that are made internationally, and to report on trends in other countries. Research, experimentation, and public relations are all facets of the work of the centre, and accompanying these duties are the responsibility to the national library community and a need for sensitivity in relating to its demands.

#### PROBLEMS WITHIN THE SOLUTION: THE INTERRELATIONSHIP OF INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL DEMANDS

By defining the national bibliographic centre as the nexus of the national library system (i.e., the channel of communication between the national and international library communities), a solution is offered which in itself presents many smaller problems. International communication may conflict with national demands at any time and in any context. The national bibliographic centre must therefore balance between the requirements of the national user and his habits and the country's contribution to international exchange. Immediate areas of conflict are apparent.

First, there are problems in considering the content of the bibliographic record. There can also be conflict here at the national level: Is the record prepared for a national bibliography adequate and satisfactory to meet the needs of the national collection? Records in a national bibliography need not relate to a longstanding collection, nor must headings preserve continuity with previous bibliographic history. The fact that the entry is comprehensive overcomes some difficulties, however, and the centre's corollary activity of maintaining the national authority list should prevent others. This problem was examined in detail in 1971, when studies were undertaken relating British Museum cataloguing to that of the *British National Bibliography* (BNB). It was decided that: "all the bibliographical records created in the future by the British Library should be based on a single comprehensive formula, which would provide a place for each category of data required by any of the Library's functions and a uniform set of rules for the form in which the data in each category are recorded."<sup>40</sup>

At the international level conflict may arise because international standards do not necessarily fit national needs. One obvious example is the form in which names of people and places appear in catalogue headings. The desirable basis for international communication is the

original form of name: for example, "Firenze" for the city known in English as "Florence." Can we demand that our national users acquire a whole new vocabulary and adjust their habits to look in catalogue entries for "München," "Suomi," "Felipe" (King of Spain), and "Johannes" (Pope John XXIII)? The new German cataloguing rules, *Regeln für die Alphabetische Katalogisierung* (RAK), do in fact impose this discipline on their intending users; in this respect these rules follow the Paris Principles more closely than do other cataloguing codes.<sup>41</sup> Obviously, the national user may not require all the data in a full record, but each element of information in that record is likely to be required at some time by some library user, either within or outside of the country.

Another problem area is the cataloguing of serials. In its international role as part of ISDS, the national serial centre identifies the serial by allocating key title and the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN); for the national bibliography, it describes the serial and, in so doing, may record the serial title differently from that appearing as the key title. The IFLA Working Group on ISBD for Serials (ISBD(S)) confronted this problem in its early deliberations and sought its solution through the use of the form "distinctive title." At the ISBD(S) Revision Meeting in October 1975, representatives of national serial centres acknowledged that two records might need to be made; all, however, accepted responsibility to "be prepared to do any extra work involved in providing both description by 'title proper' and identification by 'key title.'" <sup>42</sup>

As noted earlier, CIP operations are likely to be a joint cooperative venture of publishers and the national bibliographic centre—the results are records speedily produced and information immediately available. CIP information taken from proof sheets or supplied data sheets is not, however, complete: collation details may be missing, and possibly price. At the moment of the CIP operation, the full record cannot be prepared. Here, then, is an internal problem for the national centre to solve: Should abbreviated records appear in printed issues with the possibility of updating (which could be wasteful of space and paper and exasperating to users), or should CIP entries be listed separately as a quick additional bibliographic tool? The latter solution is used by the Deutsche Bibliographie, where a CIP project has been operational since early 1975; the CIP entries are included in a new weekly list of the *Deutsche Bibliographie, Series N*.<sup>43</sup> The former solution is that of the Australian national bibliography; entries are repeated when complete. The two oldest CIP programmes

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operating currently, those of the United States and Brazil, do not relate directly to the production of a national bibliography and therefore have not been faced with this problem.<sup>44</sup>

The function of the national bibliography as a book selection tool is most usually carried out by arranging the entries in a sequence that has subject significance—through subject headings, arrangement by classification scheme, etc. At the national (or even group) level, standardisation of the subject approach can be difficult; at the international level, the problem seems to be even more formidable. There are classification schemes used internationally: the Library of Congress, Universal Decimal, and Dewey Decimal classifications; but it may not be possible to distinguish how these are interpreted in different countries. On the other hand, the numeric or alphanumeric codes are certainly easier to transmit internationally than are subject words requiring both interpretation and translation. An international solution is not immediately apparent, but may perhaps be found in a switching mechanism such as that of the Universal System for Information in Science and Technology (UNISIST) Broad System of Ordering.<sup>45</sup> More pragmatically, and nearer to our own time, is the possible extension in the international use of one of the existing schemes. In Denmark, for example, a survey of classification schemes used by the countries contributing the largest proportion of records required by Danish libraries has shown that for Danish purposes, Dewey would be the most useful classification scheme with the greatest international usage.<sup>46</sup>

The role of the national bibliographic centre in accepting responsibility as the national agent for the international exchange of tapes has not yet been determined in some countries, nor have the centre's areas of authority in this sector been fully defined in other countries. A strong case for the centre as the channel for national export and international import of records can be argued, and it does impose a heavy burden of technical responsibility. But the problems lie not only with technical matters (which will in any case be solved with experience and technological advances); there are also questions on the protocol of exchange, and legal and "constitutional" matters that must still be settled. If the national bibliographic centre is the sole exchange point with exclusive rights granted by authority, the arrangement of the distribution of records within a country, a means of prevention of tape copying, and safeguarding the copyright of records remain to be determined. Exchange agreements now existing appear to be on a bilateral basis, but in the near future multilateral

arrangements are likely to be negotiated. In the United States, for example, the situation is complicated by the Shared Cataloging Program, so that LC MARC tapes include records from countries not yet having MARC service.<sup>47</sup> A simple solution which would fit well within the framework of UBC might be to stipulate that countries exchange only the tapes of their own imprints. At the national level, however, decisions still need to be made about how and on what basis those exchanged tapes are to be used by libraries within the country.

If an international communications system based on the exchange of bibliographic data is to be developed, then the operational unit—the national bibliographic centre—appears best equipped to carry out the functions necessary to promote that system. The problem of looking both ways, nationally and internationally, will always remain, yet in some areas solutions are within reach. Solutions cannot be found, supported and effected, however, without continuing research and experimentation by the centre. There must be flexibility and readiness to introduce new ideas and new processes in order to assist national development. The list of areas in which further work is required to develop international standards is long, but it is some indication of the willingness of the international library community to accept compromises that such a list is not longer.

In an issue of *Library Trends* published twenty years ago, David Mearns spoke profoundly of the duties of the national library:

In one important aspect a national library, at its best, is a libraries' library. . . . It undertakes studies and investigations which are beyond their capacities singly to attempt and share its findings with the rest. It contributes to their wise planning. It is their champion and advocate. . . . It is neither master or servant but is inseparably part of themselves.<sup>48</sup>

The words may now appear old-fashioned and overly dramatic, yet the sentiment remains true and the experience of technology in the library over these past two decades has heightened their value.

Thus is the national library and its bibliographic centre in its national aspects—and internationally? It is encouraging to note in the development of the UBC system that librarians of national libraries will now admit to the interconnection between bibliographic functions and national and international relationships. The new Centre bibliographique nationale of the Bibliothèque nationale has acknowledged in its establishment that it will function as a component of the UBC

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system. In Canada, the announcement of a new development in the National Library was preceded by the statement: "In the context of the Universal Bibliographic Control Program . . ."49

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