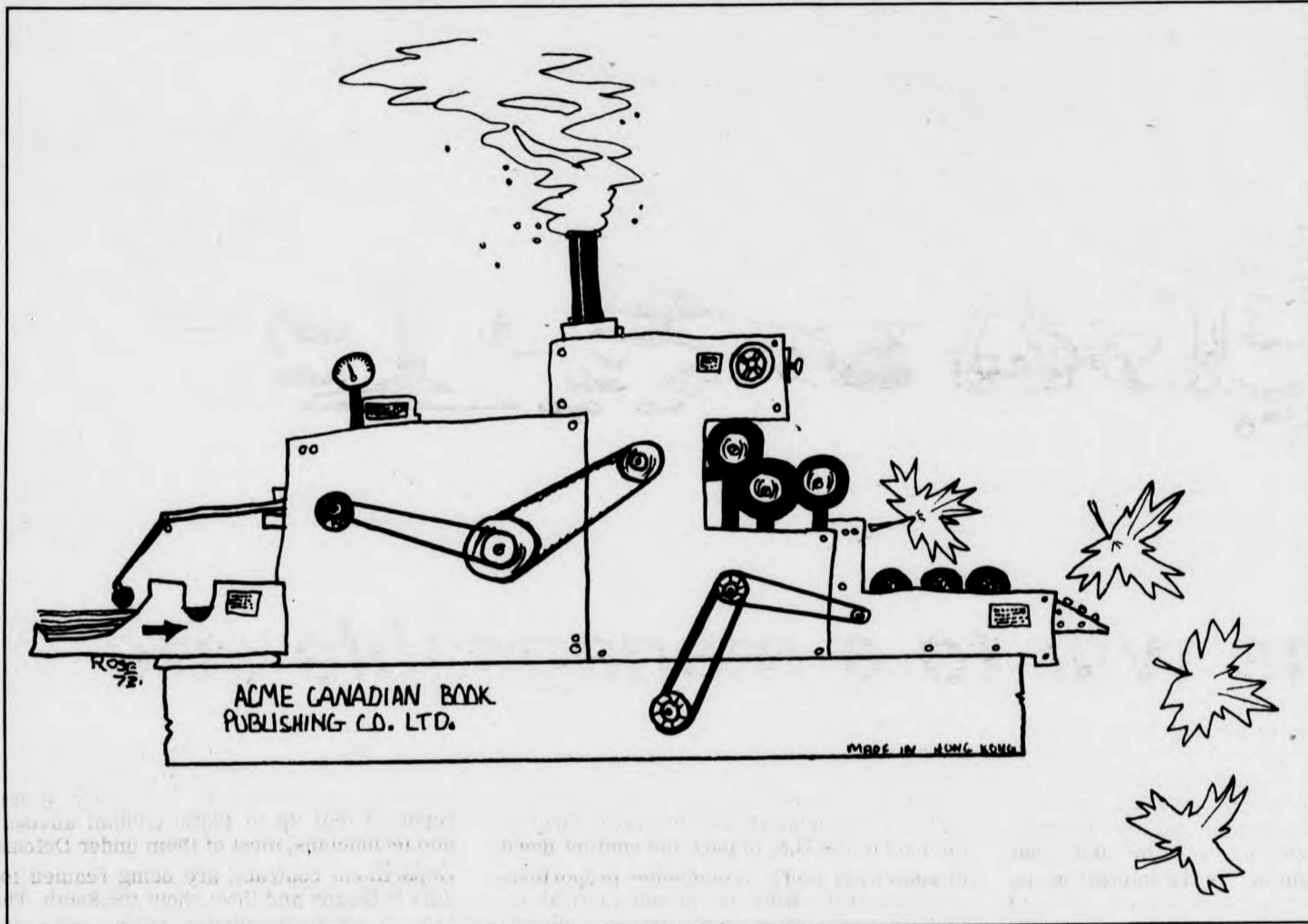


Canadian book publishing:

Token Canadian content make poor get well cards for an ailing publishing industry



By GREG GATENBY

Even before a Canadian child can read, publishing touches his life with pretty picture books.

Textbooks used throughout the educational system are an integral part of Canadian publishing, one that many Canadians quite easily forget.

And the reports and recommendations of those dry, dusty Royal Commissions and government inquiries which one day are front page news and on the following filler for the back pages, have the power to decide whether Canadians will read *The Moosegroin Monthly* instead of *Cosmopolitan*, *Life* or *Playboy*.

An Ontario Royal Commission which has investigated all facets of book publishing generally in Canada, and specifically in this province, has, through its interim reports and not so subtle sword rattling, shown many people that publishing encompasses more than the publication of a grade ten physics book. The industry is as highly complex and uniquely integrated as molecular make-up — a structure comprising writers, editors, binders, printers, distributors, and sellers. With the exception of the writer, all the others are dependent on each other for a healthy existence.

In Canada at this moment the health of the publisher has never been worse. The business suffers from chronic anemia and a severe lack of fresh air. Diagnoses indicate that the early stages of claustrophobia and xenophobia are present as well.

POOR GET WELL CARDS

Get well cards in the form of token Canadian content have been arriving from the industry's relatives south of the border, but most people here find it difficult to sympathize with the patient's position because its wounds are largely self-inflicted, either through stupidity or negligence.

Canadians buy a lot of books. In 1969 alone they spent sufficient amounts on purchases to build the new Toronto city hall seven and a half times over. But of the \$220 million they spent (of which 86 per cent, of \$191.7 million was in the English language), the shocking figure of \$144.8 million was spent on imported books.

Some persons might think that no such a disturbing amount since Canadian houses, acting as agents for foreign firms, receive some financial benefit from the importation. Yet Canadian agents handled only 58 per cent of the imported books for 1969, and the remainder bypassed Canadian houses completely for direct shipment to institutions and individuals.

Well, what of these imported books? Are they primarily specialized studies of drunken dithyrambs? Unfortunately, no. Four out of 10 books imported in 1969 were textbooks — editions not even Canadianized, fed to an educational monster with indiscriminate eating habits only now feeling indigestion from the introduction of large amounts of foreign substances into its system.

A further 35 per cent of that imported total were trade books, a phrase enveloping bestsellers (like *The Peter Principle*) as well as fiction, poetry, etc., but not books related specifically to skills and trades.

BOOKS FROM THE U.S.

Not surprisingly, the bulk of books imported to Canada came from the United States. In 1969, according to the federal government initiated Ernst and Ernst Report on Canadian Book Publishing and Manufacturing, 80 per cent of the imported dollar total, came from the U.S. A further 8 per cent came from France, and 7 per cent from the United Kingdom.

The true importance of the figures on imported books (especially in the trade and text areas), can be seen by examining Canadian purchases as a whole. Of the \$220 million Canadians spent in 1969 on books, exactly one half was spent on textbooks alone. Canadians spent 59.4 million dollars on trade books, and 19 per cent of the total (or \$41.8 million) on specialized books.

This is a great deal of money and one does not have to be a fierce nationalist to be concerned about the high percentages of it being in the hands of foreign corporations. A disheartening aspect is the projection that Canadian publishing at best is meeting only a quarter of its potential relative to its market.

The contribution made to the Gross National Product by Canadian manufactured books was a meagre .06 per cent. The Ernst Report claims that in other highly developed industrial nations, that percentage is quadrupled and there is no theoretical hindrance blocking Canadian achievement of that mark.

However, there are some practical difficulties for Canadian publishers to overcome. Until recently, Canadian controlled publishing industries were in the minority on what is laughingly referred to as The Canadian Book Publishers Council.

This organization was supposedly established by the industry to look after and concern itself with the affairs of Canadian publishing. But its domination by subsidiaries of American houses rendered its primary role of protecting Canadian interests of dubious value at best.

CANADIAN INDUSTRY SELLS OUT

With the sale of the W.J. Gage Textbook Division to the American Scott-Foresman Company, and the purchase of Ryerson Press by McGraw Hill in a short two-month period in late 1970, coupled with Jack McClelland's threat that he might have to sell his institution to an American buyer, Canadian companies realized they had to form their own organization — one that would be Canadian oriented in fact and not in name. The resulting organization is now known as the Independent Publisher's Association with a present membership of about 40 houses. Curiously, McClelland and Stewart, after forcing the government to come to its aid by threatening to sell to an American firm, has refused to join IPA.

INSULT TO IRONY

Pathetic irony surrounds the formation of this group. The IPA is one of the few attempts made by a Canadian industry

dominated by Americans to eliminate as fully as possible that foreign control, rather than wait for the governments to take legislative action. Yet the government only last year spent \$50,000 on a project organized by the America dominated Canadian Book Publishers Council (CBPC) to display books at a conference of the American Library Association — while the IPA awaits substantial government assistance.

Insult is added to irony when one realizes that a large percentage of those books being touted at the American Library Association meeting in Dallas were American authored, and as much Canadian as a salute to the stars and stripes.

Such is the federal government's concern over the state of Canadian publishing that it balks at extending aid to a Canadian publishing institution like McClelland and Stewart yet acknowledges assistance to an organization which thus far, despite its protestations to the contrary, has not shown itself to be overly involved in Canadian cultural life.

CBPC IS U.S. DOMINATED

Some of the bigger and better known members of the CBPC are owned by those invisible, multinational (read American) spoliations known as corporations.

The publishing firm of Ginn and Co. is controlled by Xerox; Van Nostrand Reinhold by Litton Industries; and Holt Rinehart and Winston by the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS).

What tangible value is inherent in spending large amount of Canadian money advertising American books in America remains to be explained. Doubtful, as well, are the efforts by the government to gain a small percentage of the American market before the Canadian (read Canadian) publishers are fully equipped to handle it. Exports of Canadian books in 1969 (the last year for which figures are readily available), amounted to only \$5.5 million, a paltry figure when compared with the \$144.8 million imported during the same year.

One might well ask if the government's (and really, the citizen's) efforts might not be better directed towards establishing a truly Canadian publishing industry first, and then concerning itself with foreign markets.

Canadians must firstly be aware of an indigenous, native talent before they will commence buying aboriginal works en masse. Americans will not nurture this awareness and so the government, in the light of no other takers, must.

All other remedies are mere quackery and akin to putting the cart before the horse or more accurately, like a contractor trying to build a skyscraper when all he possesses for building is a crew with picks and shovels.

Although this writer's bias tends towards a fierce nationalist approach in the face of obtuse, obfuscating foreign efforts at control, only a fool would fail to see that each player in the publishing game shares some blame for the industry's ills.

Publishers in general in Canada, but especially the native breed, do not give their products promotion they deserve neither to the press or the public. Often this is because they do have neither the resources in manpower or their budgets for advertising. But this condition simply entraps such publishers in a vicious circle. As long as publishers cannot afford to promote their books the longer they'll fail to do more than break even. And as long as they only break even (or thereabouts), the longer they will be unable to spend extra monies promoting their source of livelihood — namely books.

Moreover, through what many consider misguided nationalism, members of IPA refuse to co-publish their works with foreign based houses interested in their projects.

One Canadian publisher-agent told the Ontario Royal Commissioners he represented exclusively no fewer than 36 foreign publishers. Two others claimed representation of 33, while the remaining 54 agents shared the balance 474 publishers of the imported lines somewhat unevenly among them. It's a free enterprise dream and a nationalist nightmare. The Commission went on: "Several of the overloaded agencies just refused to undertake almost no original Canadian publishing. Perhaps it is not surprising that they were among those that maintained the lowest profiles during our hearings."

The Commission also took exception to the statement of the Ernst Report that Canada was meeting only a quarter of its potential in the book publishing field. With some justification they noted that "the economies of scale possible for original Canadian publishing and original American (or British) publishing are weighted heavily in favour of the foreign product. Because of the difference in size of potential markets, the unit cost of a book originated in this country tends to be high, while the traditional price levels are set by imported books chiefly by those from the United States."

"Thus the same percentage of publishing misjudgments is more costly in Canada and the same percentage of publishing successes provides less income with which to underwrite the mistakes."

Some people see this market condition as suitable grounds for government intervention and support of the industry. But the question of subsidies here is really part of a much larger question: To what degree should the government support the arts?

Given the present chaotic condition of governmental aid to the arts, their arbitrary and helter-skelter aid to writers and publishers, the dissension and lack of efficient organization within the publishing industry itself, it's amazing that as much good comes of all this assistance as does. Still, it's assistance measured in terms of 100 million taxpayer dollars — and the end product now being produced isn't good value for the money.