



Department of Justice

ADDRESS OF

HONORABLE ROBERT F. KENNEDY

INTERNATIONAL NIGHT
AMERICAN BOOKSELLERS ASSOCIATION, INC.
SHOREHAM HOTEL

June 4, 1962

I am pleased to be with you tonight for I feel that you who deal in books in this country are a vital part of American life.

I am particularly pleased to be a part of your International evening for as books are a vital part of American life, they are a crucial element in portraying our life to people of other countries. Today how well we accomplish the task of describing our life to the people of the world is very much part of our security.

On my recent trip abroad, I was amazed at the volume and variety of Communist printed matter readily available on the streets of the cities of the uncommitted nations. This is particularly true in Asia.

One afternoon while we were in Indonesia, I walked into a book store in Djakarta and browsed among the shelves to see what books were on display. It was not a happy experience.

There were a number of highly technical textbooks in English -- but no books on American history; none on American government; none of our novelists or poets were represented. There was not one book by the President of the United States.

But there were many books about Russia, about their leaders and about their cosmonauts. There were biographies of Titov and Gagarin -- but nothing about the astronauts of Project Mercury.

Here, clearly we were missing an opportunity. The operator of the book store said he would be glad to display our books -- but that few were offered to him.

This is disturbing. It is disturbing to see the minds of the uncommitted people of the world subjected to a deluge of printed matter hostile to our way of life.

The Communists have a seeming advantage here. If someone in power in Moscow or Peiping decides that half a million books should be sent to Burma, it is done by edict. Their publishing is run by the state and for the state, and they are not concerned with a free market system.

I say that the Communist deluge of printed matter is disturbing. It is that, but it should not be frightening.

For we in this country can compete with anyone in communicating ideas. We have great capabilities in this field. We should not shrink from a contest in the forum of the printed word. We have many advantages, and they outweigh any apparent efficiency of a totalitarian system.

Our greatest advantage is that we are a free society. Books here are created in response to the need for knowledge, the need for education, and the need for entertainment. They are not created at the whim of a totalitarian state.

And our books truthfully cover the spectrum of American life. They cover our failures as well as our successes. We would not have it otherwise.

American books reflect our common heritage with many other nations and their influence upon our culture. The influences are endless, linking us with the rest of the world. Thus, they are good ambassadors for us.

Christopher Morely has said, "When you sell a man a book you don't sell him twelve ounces of paper and ink and glue -- you sell him a whole new life."

We are not necessarily trying to sell new lives, but we are trying to show our way of life, and there is no better way to do it than through our books.

But now we are not doing enough.

We sold about ninety million dollars worth of books overseas last year. A good deal of this went to Canada and our allies in Western Europe while sales of books in Asia, Africa and South America were very limited.

At the same time the Soviet Union was sending 40,000,000 books to non-Communist nations. Clearly we must do more with the good weapon we have in our hands.

Government must do more and the private citizens must do more -- particularly those of you in the book industry. Here is something you can do for your country.

I recommend to you tonight that a committee of leaders of the book industry in this country be formed to consider how we can get more and better American books read by more people -- particularly students -- in the uncommitted nations of the world.

This committee should represent all parts of the industry in addition to you who sell books.

I know that representatives of the industry are serving on the Cultural Advisory Committee of United States Information Agency and have been most helpful. The industry has also helped out in our aid programs.

But I would like to see an ad hoc committee devote itself specifically to this problem.

Here are a series of specific suggestions which you in the industry might consider. Your advice would make a very real contribution.

First, we must do more to share our technical knowledge of printing, publishing and distribution methods with our friends in developing countries. A start has already been made in this direction through our aid programs. More needs to be done, and plans are being made to see that it is.

We need private initiative. This committee could serve as a clearing house for assistance from the industry in this program. It would serve as a focal point of the private efforts to bolster our aid programs.

Second, we need more joint ventures with overseas firms. A few of our book firms now have good working relationships with foreign firms, but your committee might do much to expand these kinds of arrangements.

It can be good business. The markets in developing countries are going to expand. There will be more people. They will be more literate, and they will have more money to spend on their already great thirst for knowledge.

Your committee might do a great deal to see that this thirst is satisfied by American books. The technical knowledge, the capital, and the book rights of our companies can join with the local marketing knowledge, translation capacity, and know-how of overseas firms in an effective partnership.

Curtis Benjamin of McGraw Hill recently pointed out the possibility of this kind of arrangement in Latin America. He believes that the welcome mat would be out in many countries.

Third, we in the government are booksellers in a big way, but at present there is no effective device for marketing overseas. The Government Printing Office publishes 10,000 titles a year and has a standing stock of some 25,000 titles.

Your committee can suggest means of getting some of these publications into overseas markets. Many of them would not be suitable, but there are a large number that would be.

I am thinking of some of the relatively simple publications on how to raise chickens and tomatoes. Even though written for American audiences, they would undoubtedly be of interest in the nations where raising enough food for the people is the prime problem.

In addition, there are good GPO publications on government and history which might be useful abroad. Your committee might suggest what we could do productively in this area.

Incidentally, we in the government are sometimes accused of being unimaginative. I was interested to find out that one of the GPO pamphlets on the technicalities of growing tomatoes is entitled "Hot Beds and Cold Frames". That title should do well in any market.

Four, we must do more to see that translation rights to American books are made available to overseas firms on the best possible terms. This may represent an immediate economic sacrifice, but I would hope that your committee might encourage the American industry to this. In the long run, it might help to create a bigger market for its product.

The cost of the translation right is a major factor in the decision of a foreign firm to publish. It is an outlay that must be made before any return is realized, and these firms are often short of capital. This cost should not be a hindrance to getting American books published overseas.

Five, we must revamp our donation program. There is a vast reservoir of good will among the American people which could be utilized to send books overseas.

Your committee might suggest the best means of doing this. In the past, too often donations have been inappropriate culls from attics -- we don't need 1912 almanacs. There is also the problem of transporting the books overseas -- a costly proposition.

An effective pilot measure might be the donation of an over-run of a hundred copies of titles of new, serious, non-fiction works by American publishers. This is the kind of book we need.

This can be good business also. USIA reports that one publisher gave them a hundred copies of a basic reference work to be placed in libraries overseas and within a short time the publisher received orders for fifty more copies from the same sources.

Sixth, there is another aspect of this whole problem which is important for your committee. It is really the reverse of the process we have been talking about. That is making sure the Americans read more of what is being written abroad.

If we are to lead the free world, we must know what the world is thinking and writing. This involves not only the writing of Western Europe with whom our cultural bonds have always been close, but that of the developing nations as well.

What are the angry young men of Nigeria writing? What books are being produced in Southeast Asia in this time of turmoil there? What is new in the ancient culture of South America?

The American reading public should have the answers to these questions available to them on their bookshelves.

Last year only about ten per cent of the new titles published in this country were translations and most of those were from our established cultural partners. This percentage should increase and it should include more from the developing nations of the world where exciting things are going on.

See what can be done about this.

These are suggestions for the consideration of a committee from your industry. The committee might want to get into other possibilities. We will come to you with more suggestions and problems.

I urge that this committee would become a reality in the very near future, that it would start work and that by the time of your meeting next year would have a report to submit to the President. We need your help.

We in government need to help ourselves also.

USIA, through its libraries and its book programs, is doing much to get our books to the minds of the uncommitted nations of the world. More needs to be done and plans are under way to see that it is.

The Agency for International Development has a big role to play in this work. They are taking a good look at their book programs. More low cost books are one of the goals of the Alliance for Progress in Latin America and we expect stepped-up activity in this regard.

I would hope that the Congress would see fit to pass legislation implementing the Florence Agreement. This agreement, as you know, would eliminate tariffs reciprocally among the thirty-five nations on books and some educational material. It has been approved by the Senate but implementing legislation is needed. The President's trade bill will also help in this regard.

This, then, is a joint effort. We in government must do more, and we are calling upon you in the book industry to do more.

It must be done because books are becoming more and more a part of the lives of the three billion people of this world. In 1954, half the people of the world could not read.

But illiteracy is vanishing rapidly and the percentage of educated young men is growing fastest in the developing nations which are not formulating their concept of government.

In India, the literacy rate has increased two and a half times in the past ten years.

In Latin America school enrollment increased 20% from 1956 to 1959.

Three quarters of the children of primary school age in Asia were not in school in 1950. Today half of them are.

Students are, of course, the most avid readers of all, and in the developing nations of the world they are a motivating force in the political life. In Asia and Latin America, students are not only the political leaders of tomorrow -- they are now among the leaders. Their actions and attitudes often determine what government must do.

We must reach this vital audience with our books. It is a crucial forum where the American way of life must be presented fully and fairly.

So, it is a good thing that you are devoting this evening of your meeting to the international aspect of bookselling and that you have an international exhibit here. We need more of this so that more books by overseas authors will be in American homes and offices and so that more of

our books are before those of the world who are deciding which road their nation will take.

Twenty years ago, in the darkest days of the Second World War, President Roosevelt sent your meeting a message. He said:

"We all know that books burn -- yet we have the greater knowledge that books cannot be killed by fire. People die but books never die. No man and no force can abolish memory. In this war we know books are weapons."

Books are weapons for us now also. And we have excellent ones -- the best in the world.

We must get these weapons into action.