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Private Censoring Or Uncut History?

By Geoffrey A. Wolff

THE MYRIAD problems attaching themselves to post-facto censorship of books written, published, sold and alleged to be pornographic have overshadowed the less dramatic but far more urgent question of the precensorship of history. There is increasing evidence that a considerable number of planned books will not be written and written books will remain unpublished because they are embarrassing to people highly placed who have the power to cajole or bully out of existence words they find repellent.

Two recent cases of such precensorship have originated in the White House, the first being the suppression of a book of speeches by the President to which was appended an essay by former presidential aide Richard Goodwin. Soon after Goodwin delivered himself of a speech critical of Administration foreign policy his book, already released for review in galleys, was withdrawn and recalled by McGraw Hill.

More recently a Mr. Schoenstein wrote a book to be published by Doubleday about the President's dogs which Elizabeth Carpenter fancied to be repellent to the dignity of the President's high office. It too has been suppressed after its publisher was warned that to print the book would be to sacrifice future cooperation from the White House with its various writers.

WE SHOULD not, probably, much lament the disappearance of the inside story of a brace of puppies but the suppression sets a most dangerous precedent. If such a nonbook, whose potential for offensiveness would seem to be limited, can be suppressed there is reason to fear that real books, against whose revelations people highly placed have real reason to move, may increasingly be withheld.

It was perfectly fair for Mary Hemingway to attempt to enjoin against the publication of A. E. Hotchner's biography of her husband and for Helen C. Frick to attempt to prevent the publication of Sylvester K. Stevens' biography of her father. The court found for Hotchner and, in the interests of history and free speech, it is to be hoped they find against Miss Frick, but at least these disputes have been openly raised and will be openly settled.

John-Paul Sartre observed that "Words are loaded pistols." Precensorship has tacitly admitted the truth of his remark as has a seemingly different but in fact related activity of the Government vis a vis books. I speak of the

subsidization of books useful to the Establishment, the other side of the coin of the suppression of what is embarrassing.

For some time the C.I.A. and U.S.I.A. have used the taxpayers' money to commission works of propaganda to plead our official positions against Communism. In 1965 U.S.I.A. paid \$53,591 for 16 books that it freely admits would otherwise never have been written or published, more than half of which came from Praeger, Inc. (now owned by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*). It then subjected the books to editorial changes to bring them fully into line with current official policies.

IT IS at least a questionable practice to use public monies for the proselytizing of beliefs that may not be those of the majority of our citizens, but what is clearly hateful is that there is no truth in the packaging of these made-to-order wares. A citizen buying a book that pretends to tell the truth about Cuba is forced to rely on the reputations of its author and publisher, and pays his money on the basis of those reputations. He is cheated. No Government *imprimatur* tells him what he would surely want to know: that he is paying for a book that, because of its nature, is anything but an objective account and a book that showed so little merit, or sales potential, that it needed extraordinary and artificial support.

Leonard Marks, Director of U.S.I.A., replying to a question by Congressman Glenard P. Lipscomb (R-Calif.) during hearings on this subject in the House of Representatives, explained why it is useful to protect the taxpayer against the true nature of the product he pays for twice, once in taxes and again when he buys the book:

Mr. Lipscomb: "Why is it wrong to let the American people know when they buy and read the book that it was developed under Government sponsorship?"

Mr. Marks: "It minimizes their value . . . If we say this is our book, then the author is a Government employe in effect. It changes the whole status of the author . . ."

It is this double activity, the suppression and creation of ideas, hidden from public view, that reinforces the fears of American artists that the Government cannot be trusted, is not yet mature enough, to contribute to the subsidization of ideas.