

Book Awards Imperilled

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By JOYCE ILLIG

THE CONSTANTLY struggling-to-survive National Book Committee, responsible for the annual National Book Awards, the biggest and most prestigious literary prizes in this country, may give up the financial fight at the end of this month.

There is speculation that if the committee dies of fiscal anemia the book awards will be presented during the American Booksellers Association convention in New York in June. It has also been suggested that the prizes be given in Chicago. John Franz, executive chairman of the National Book Committee for the past four years, acknowledged the reports but said he is still planning to go ahead with the 26th annual awards ceremony in New York, April 16. Four of the 10 panels of judges are complete with the other panels partially filled, and books are being sent to the judges.

Rumors of the demise of the National Book Committee have popped up frequently over the past few years but never before have they been so close to fact. "I think probably that we're closer to making an ultimate decision now," said Franz, "partly because of the present financial condition and partly because we're beginning to ask ourselves: Is it worth it?" The decision will be made at a meeting of the executive committee September 30.

Who would take over the National Book Awards, if the National Book Committee should fold, hasn't been discussed officially. What has been discussed is the financing of the book awards. "We run a deficit every year," Franz said. "Last year it was a cash deficit—not indirect costs or overhead—in the neighborhood of \$16,000. This year it's likely to be about the same.

"I have discussed, without conclusion, the willingness of the general publishing division of the Association of American Publishers to indemnify us against a cash loss. If they say no, then I've got to find other sources," Franz said.

The question of administering the awards, however, is not one of

money alone but of policy. Is it in the best interests of the traditionally independent awards to have the Association of American Publishers administer it, or the American Booksellers

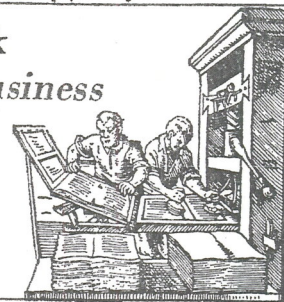
JOYCE ILLIG writes regularly on the publishing scene for Book World.

Association? Franz resists such suggestions. Alternative possibilities are PEN, the Authors League, and the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

Franz said that the awards cost about \$90,000, and that this year they are likely to cost close to \$100,000. The general publishing division of the AAP assesses itself up to \$25,000 for the costs of the National Books program. The Children's Book Council contributes \$1,000 for the award for the best children's book and also pays some of the travel expenses of the judges in the category. The ABA and the National Association of College Bookstores contribute \$1,000 each. The Publishers' Publicity Association advises the committee on the awards ceremony and coordinates and sponsors the collateral events of that week.

Fifty per cent of the National Book Committee's income comes from the sales of National Library Week materials. (About 40 per cent of the costs go to produce

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those materials.) Twenty-five per cent comes from contributions by corporations, foundations, etc., and the other 25 per cent comes from individually funded projects.

BERNARD L. BARKER and Eugenio R. Martinez, two of the five men initially arrested at the

Watergate break-in, are the subject of a book to come from Harper's Magazine Press next summer.

It's being written by George Crile, an investigative reporter and contributing editor to Harper's Magazine, who will concentrate on the two Cubans' careers from their first involvement in hot and cold-war violence through Watergate.

Crile is getting an assist from Taylor Branch, the Washington editor of Harper's Magazine, who will concentrate on Barker while Crile interviews Martinez.

Both Barker and Martinez were former CIA agents and according to Lawrence Freundlich, editor-in-chief of Harper's Magazine Press, the book will escape being enjoined from publication

because it's not going to be a first-person story by Barker and Martinez. "I hope it has the same authority, though, as if they had written it themselves," added Freundlich.

He said that the reason he wants to publish this book is because he feels that "the notion of political espionage and violence—developed during the cold war with enemies who had nothing to do with America—has been imported to this country. And instead of our seeing it as an abrogation of the things that America is supposed to stand for at its best, a lot of people are looking at it as the loyal and right thing to do. Martinez and Barker take part in that mentality."

The project began when Crile was preparing the articles on Barker and Martinez which ap-

pear in this month's Harper's.

WHEN ANNE BUCHWALD, wife of political satirist Art Buchwald, started her own literary agency in Washington a year and a half ago, she also formed an association with Irving Lazar, the Hollywood agent recently retained to sell Richard Nixon's memoirs. The Buchwalds had known Lazar for 25 years. "He was interested in the Washington scene," said Ann Buchwald, "and I was interested in working with someone who had been in the business 35 years."

It all worked out until Lazar made the deal to handle the Nixon book. "Then it just conflicted with Art's peace of mind," said Ann, "so to keep peace in the family I called Lazar and told him that my husband wasn't comfortable with my having anything to do with it and therefore I will not." Ann said they were still pals and that Lazar was understanding.

One of their big book contracts, signed last week, was with Doubleday for Abigail McCarthy's first novel. It has *The Ladies Remembered* as its working title, is due for publication in 1976 and is described as a political novel.

McCarthy's first book, *Private Faces/Public Places* was a candid self-portrait of her life as a political wife and mother. She and Senator Eugene McCarthy have been separated since 1969.

RICHARD ADAMS, whose record-breaking and still best-selling first novel was about rabbits, has written a second about a bear called "Shardik." It was bought at auction for close to \$600,000 by Simon & Schuster and Avon. Avon will publish the paperback a year after Simon & Schuster brings it out next May.