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Publishers Warned of Threats to U.S. Freedoms

By HENRY RAYMONT

The Association of American Publishers held its fall meeting yesterday amid warnings that Government censorship and radical pressure groups are increasingly threatening the nation's First Amendment freedoms.

A report by the association's Freedom to Read Committee likened the situation to the McCarthy era of the early nineteen-fifties, "when attacks on intellectual freedom by the Government and various pressure groups were at their peak."

Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights, in a speech prepared for the closing dinner at the end of the day-long meeting at the Biltmore Hotel, said:

"If America is to be free, her Government must permit her people to think their own thoughts and determine their own associations without official instruction or intimidation."

Moralists Assailed

At a luncheon session the association heard Homer D. Babbridge Jr., president of the University of Connecticut, assail what he called "a virulent new version" of American moralists, who he said were interfering with free cultural exchanges among nations.

He cited the Jewish Defense League's disruption of concerts by Soviet artists, groups on campuses who thwarted speakers from Greece and Portugal and critics who urged a pull-out from Olympic competitions in South Africa because of that country's racial policies.

Senator Ervin's speech was the high point of a day in which more than 300 chief ex-

ecutives from literary and educational publishing houses and university presses discussed such diverse subjects as international copyright problems, dwindling funds for libraries and Government pressures against the publication of controversial materials.

In an extensive analysis of the First Amendment, Senator Ervin, a North Carolina Democrat, developed arguments he has been using against the Nixon Administration on such issues as the use of lie detectors on Federal employes, Army surveillance of private citizens and President Nixon's Executive order expanding the mandate of the Subversive Activities Control Board.

Concern Is expressed

The Senator's speech reflected a concern that leading members of the publishing community have frequently expressed and the was often a factor in yesterday's panel meetings and general discussions — namely, that Government attempts to interfere with such publishing ventures as the Pentagon study of the Vietnam war or the dissemination of radical books in libraries represented a threat to freedom of speech and press.

"It is a critical fact that we are now faced with the necessity of defending the First Amendment," W. Bradford Wiley, chairman of the association, said at a morning meeting. "Nothing like this had happened since the days of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy."

Kenneth D. McCormick, vice president of Doubleday and chairman of the association's Freedom to Read Committee, reported that, among other activities this year, the committee had protested a contempt citation against the Columbia

Broadcasting System for refusing to supply out takes, or unused film, from its documentary "The Selling of the Pentagon" and had filed a brief opposing the Government action against The New York Times and other newspapers for publishing the Pentagon Papers.

Mr. McCormick said the association would also file a brief in behalf of the Rev. Phillip F. and the Rev. Daniel J. Berrigan, supporting the rights of Federal prisoners to disseminate their writings and recordings to publishers and the public.

Pressures Held Widening

Declaring that pressures from private groups to have certain titles removed from public and school libraries were no longer confined to pornography and sex education, he said:

"It is more and more the book that really talks about the war and gives two sides of it, that presents the race problem as more than an unfortunate spat between two regions, that presents the United States as a country that's been right sometimes and wrong at others."

Other speakers who expressed concern that the political acrimony was interfering with the free exchange of ideas were John C. Frantz, executive chairman of the National Book Committee; Whitney North Seymour, a former president of the American Bar Association, and Harrison E. Salisbury, assistant managing editor of The New York Times.

In introducing Senator Ervin, Robert L. Bernstein, president of Random House, who is vice chairman of the association, noted that the Senator's subcommittee planned to start hearings on Sept. 28 on "the meaning of the First Amendment's prohibition against abridgement of freedom of the

press" and that publishers, newspaper editors and government officials had been invited to testify.

Pounding away at a favorite theme, Senator Ervin said that the First Amendment "is based upon an abiding faith that our country has nothing to fear from the exercise of its freedom as long as it leaves truth free to combat error."

If the right to express dissent is respected, he declared, "violent revolution has no rational or rightful place in our system."

Mr. Ervin, a political conservative who is considered the leading constitutional law expert in the Senate, said President Nixon's order strengthening the mandate of the Subversive Activities Control Board was "beyond the constitutional power of the President," too broad to have any legal value and in violation of the First Amendment.

Mr. Nixon's order, issued July 2, gave the board the power to hold hearings to help determine which organizations should be classified as subversive by the Attorney General.

Before the order, the board, an independent, semijudicial agency created in 1950, had had little work to do for several years.