

The State Department Sings A Variation on an Old Theme

Latest Directive Echoes the Original One on the Uses of Communist Authors

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WASHINGTON, July 9—To anyone who remembers as far back as February, the State Department's new policy statement on its overseas library books had a familiar ring. In fact, it rang like the directive of Feb. 3 that, in the process of being reversed, clarified and shredded, has reduced some State Department officials to a state of raw nerves.

That first directive was a target in a free-swinging investigation of the Voice of America by Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, Republican of Wisconsin, because it permitted the distribution of books by Communist or such "Soviet-endorsed" writers as Howard Fast whenever they proved favorable to the United States "among selected key audiences."

So on Feb. 19, those orders were scrapped and replaced by new ones forbidding the use by the Voice of America in its libraries of any works by "Communists, fellow-travelers, et cetera."

Return to a Premise

But yesterday's statement, hopefully and meticulously composed to end "book-burning" and restore some element of common sense to the Government's information policies, returned to the premise of the first directive:

"It is conceivable that the special purpose and character of our libraries may require, in special cases, the inclusion of books by Communists or Communist sympathizers if such authors may have written something which affirmatively serves the end of democracy."

Today, with his own memory unimpaired, Senator McCarthy probably wondered how the first directive he had disposed of could suddenly re-appear, and he termed the new statement "completely ridiculous," because Communists inevitably advanced the cause of communism.

With something strikingly like a reflex action, the State Department's International Information Administration promptly produced an "amplification" of the paragraphs offending the Wisconsin Senator.

"I do not for a moment believe," said Dr. Robert L. Johnson, administrator of the overseas information agency, "that a Communist author ever speaks affirmatively for democracy. But it would be unwise to foreclose the opportunity of using, to serve affirmatively the ends of democracy, something that a Communist has writ-

ten for an entirely different purpose."

There have been no important changes in the State Department's overseas information program since February except for the retrenchment forced on the department by budget cuts. In general, Voice of America broadcasts have been reduced in numbers and time to the free areas of the world while programs beamed to audiences behind the Iron Curtain have been stepped up. The recent Presidential reorganization order would separate the entire overseas information program, including the Voice, from the State Department and create an independent United States Information Service.

Content, Not Authors

The Feb. 3 directive was based on the recommendation of the State Department's Book Advisory Commission of eminent authors, publishers and librarians that the content of broadcast of information material, rather than its author, should determine its utility.

That principle was abandoned, however, and the practice of clearing books on the basis of the author's political connections was begun. Thereupon, books were banned if they were by known Communists or by persons who refused, under the protection of the Fifth Amendment (against self-incrimination in criminal cases) to disclose their political connections.

Yesterday's statement once again says that the judgment of a book will be based initially on its contents—"its special usefulness in terms of our overseas needs." It acknowledged that "an appraisal of this usefulness cannot disregard the reputation or standing of the author."

Directive Clarifies Directive

Last March 17, a directive was issued to clarify the directive that reversed and replaced the Feb. 3 directive.

It banned the works of Communists, pro-Communists and "controversial" persons.

The new statement, however, finds "controversial" books quite relevant to the American way of life and softens its endorsement of controversy only by warning against confusing it with conspiracy.

So those people with long memories, who may remember how the State Department got off to this same start six months ago, have begun to leave their seats and edge toward the rear of the theatre.