

IFLA and Its Future Policy

The International Federation of Library Associations has grown in membership and in the extent of its program since its establishment in 1927. Proposed as being essential to its continued success are: (1) a broader base for its fiscal support; (2) special conferences for particular groups of librarians; (3) improved annual programing; (4) better communication between IFLA and its constituent organizations; and, (5) a more extensive publication program.

THE Council of the International Federation of Library Associations held its thirtieth meeting in Rome from September 14 to 18, 1964. There were approximately three hundred librarians in attendance from thirty-three countries. Though we may ascribe this unusually high number partly to the city where the meeting took place—many delegates combined their professional duties with some Italian tourism—it cannot be denied that there is a growing interest in the activities of IFLA all over the world. That the Russian delegation numbered twenty-eight persons and that forty librarians came from the United States give ample proof of the fact that the influence of IFLA in the library world is gaining.

IFLA's chairman, Sir Frank Francis, well-known director of the British Museum, in his opening address did not leave his audience in doubt about what he saw as IFLA's task in a changing world. Quoting the introductory pages of *Libraries in the World* he pointed out that "the task to be fulfilled by libraries

after World War II is not only many times heavier than before 1940, but has also in many respects changed a good deal in character. The technical and political revolutions in recent decades are making their impact deeply felt in nearly every sphere of life to-day. Hardly anyone can claim to be unaffected by the new media of mass-communication, by the coming of age of young races and peoples, and by the shifts of political influence from traditional centers to others about which we know as yet little or nothing. The almost oppressive development of science and techniques has made the world much smaller, has drawn all countries much more than before into the field of scientific research and has confronted humanity with problems at once frightening yet full of almost infinite possibilities." The text from which this quotation is taken continues by devoting a paragraph to the part libraries will play under these circumstances, in which more than ever it is "necessary for libraries all over the world to keep in touch with each other, to keep abreast of the needs of one country, of the aid to be given by other countries, of the most recent developments in the fields of organization, documentation, technical equipment, by which they will be able to

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satisfy demands continually becoming more complex."

It is here that IFLA could render great services, but also one must ask the question posed by the president at the end of his speech: "To what extent can IFLA speak with a world voice?" For a long series of years IFLA found its stronghold in Western Europe with some support from the United States. Only recently it has begun to extend the frontiers; Russia and America became more interested, and by 1962 the number of members had risen to ninety (from fifty countries). It is clear that a complete reorganization for IFLA is needed, so as to enable it to take its full place as a truly international body. The first steps on the way to this reorganization have already been taken, but it will be a long time before the end will be attained. It is my intention in this paper to note some requirements in various fields which IFLA must fulfill if it is to accomplish its new tasks in a satisfactory way. I must begin, however, by giving a brief outline of IFLA's past and present, because many of its deficiencies are easily explained by its own history.

Passing by various previous meetings where the desire for an international library organization was expressed, I recall only the proposal made by Mr. G. Henriot at the International Conference of Librarians and Book Lovers (held in Prague in 1926) to set up an international committee representing the various national library associations to prepare international library conferences. As a result of this proposal which was unanimously adopted at the fiftieth anniversary conference of the ALA held in Atlantic City in 1926 a resolution was passed asking the ALA to take the initiative and submit to the national associations a plan for the creation of an International Library Committee. Delegates authorized to study this plan and to vote would be invited to the fiftieth anniversary conference of the British Library Association in the following year

at Edinburgh. There an "International Library and Bibliographical Committee" was definitely established. So 1927 may be considered as the year of IFLA's birth, though it was still a Committee. The name was changed to International Federation of Library Associations in 1929 at the first International Library Congress in Rome; the number of associations that had joined was already more than twenty. The executive board was called the International Library Committee.

This change of name also meant a change of course. The original idea was to create a permanent committee which was to prepare an international congress every five years and to carry out the resolutions of such a congress. Instead, a committee representing an international federation met every year, sub-committees with special tasks were set up, and the preparation of congresses fell into the background. A second consequence was perhaps more serious. The originally planned permanent committee was supposed to have a bureau with an informative task of its own on behalf of libraries all over the world. Nothing of the sort happened, however, much to the detriment of IFLA.

During the presidencies of I. Collyn, W. W. Bishop, and M. Godet, in the period 1930-1940, IFLA showed a slow but steady growth. The number of member-associations was twenty-seven in 1932 and forty-one in 1939. The attendance at the meetings, averaging about fifty delegates and observers, was small. In 1935 a second international congress took place in Madrid and Barcelona with a general theme of Public Libraries.

This congress was not only important in itself, but it worked also to stimulate the meetings of IFLA. In Madrid Marcel Godet had submitted his well-known report on international loan with the result that in the meeting at Warsaw in 1936 the rules and the forms for international loan were discussed. Another subject brought up for discussion at

Warsaw was the relation between librarians and documentalists. Documentation in those years became more widely known, and consequently librarians had to take up their position with respect to this new phenomenon. As a result of the congress at Madrid, where a subcommittee for special libraries had been established, the Institut International de Documentation asked for a certain cooperation between the two international organizations, a proposal to which IFLA agreed.

During the war years the work of IFLA came to a standstill. The first meeting after the war took place in Oslo in 1946, not without reason, because Godet was succeeded as president by W. Munthe, the director of the National and University Library at Oslo. The Germans and Italians were not invited, but nevertheless fifty-two delegates from eighteen countries were present. Thanks to the preparatory work of the secretariat—Dr. T. P. Sevensma was secretary from 1929 to 1958!—the members of all the subcommittees were already appointed.

Satisfactory as this might seem, IFLA's traditionalism was disappointing. Fortunately it met with some opposition, and for the first time some of the subcommittees, which always had been a sort of façade, had a real meeting. It was decided to reserve for this purpose at least one day in the future. This was an improvement, but even so the work of the subcommittees was difficult. It is the usual experience in international meetings that such things as good agenda, reports submitted in time, and fruitful discussions depend largely on the president and the secretary and the preparatory work they do between sessions. Many subcommittees failed in this respect, and IFLA's president and the general secretary apparently had difficulty in finding the happy mean between a *laissezaller* policy and severe rules.

In 1955 after the plans for a congress in the United States had failed a third

international congress met in Brussels. Although the more than one thousand four hundred persons attending this meeting made it in itself pleasant it was also abundantly clear that a world congress of librarians had become an unwieldy institution without much practical use. In a certain sense this congress meant the end of a period. Although IFLA's new president since 1952, Pierre Bourgeois, director of the Swiss National Library, took an active part in the preparation of the Brussels Congress, he had already in his first year voiced his opinion that the future would be for regional congresses.

This had been one of the reasons for a change of the statutes of IFLA in 1952 to the effect that in connection with the growth of IFLA the International Library Committee would be named Council, and in consequence the subcommittees would be named committees. Next to these there would be sections of special groups or of a regional character. It was very important that henceforth, next to national library associations, national and international associations with similar interests might be admitted to membership. This was to counter the tendency for other organizations to take over part of the work of IFLA, which of course could not prevent the founding of other associations, but could incorporate them and still leave them complete liberty.

This change of statutes had considerable consequence. A section of National and University Libraries and a section of Public Libraries were formed. The first regional section became the section of Latin-American Library Associations. For the Theatrical Libraries and Museums and for the International Association of Technical University Libraries new sections were formed, and the International Association of Agricultural Librarians and Documentalists was admitted as a member.

All these changes were symptoms of a new trend in the world of libraries. Dur-

ing Bourgeois' presidency the number of member-associations rose from fifty-three to seventy-three. Bourgeois was succeeded in 1958 by G. Hofmann, director general of the Bavarian State Library, under whose presidency the problem of the secretariat was the order of the day. The rise of the number of members and consequently of the attendance at the meetings—the last three years about 150—made very high demands upon the secretary. He had also the responsibility for the editing of the annual *Actes*—the latest volumes numbered 343 and 283 pages!—and for the *IFLA Communications* published in the international library periodical *Libri*. And the correspondence grew and grew!

IFLA felt what many organizations feel nowadays, that the happy days are no more when the secretary's task was accomplished as a side-line. A permanent secretary was badly needed, and thanks to a much higher subvention of UNESCO this was realized late in 1962. It was necessary, if IFLA was to come up to the expectations that it might be a worldwide organization.

Is IFLA going to live up to that name? There are some hopeful signs. The International Conference on Cataloguing Principles subsidized by the Council on Library Resources, held in the UNESCO building in October 1961, was prepared by IFLA and was as an international meeting a great success. At the Edinburgh session of September 1961 a working group of three was charged with the preparation of a long-term program, the result of which was published in May 1963 under the title *Libraries in the World* (French title: *Les bibliothèques dans le monde*). A program for the first five to ten years was outlined in this publication, which is well-received and will be translated into various languages. The *Guide to Union Catalogues and International Loan Centers* by L. Brummel and E. Egger was published under IFLA's auspices in 1961 and is already out of print. As a nongovernmental orga-

nization IFLA has now the so-called Consultative Status A with UNESCO, which gives it an influential position. An information bulletin *IFLA News* has appeared since 1962 in two languages.

Without any doubt all this sounds satisfactory. But the question may be repeated whether IFLA, whose post-war meetings were quite recently characterized by a former UNESCO official as genial family parties, can speak to any extent with a world voice.¹ The answer is yes and no. "Yes," in so far as IFLA has a large number of national associations as members and has some real international publications and the Conference on Cataloguing Principles on its account. "No," in so far as IFLA leaves still to be desired that it obtain results necessary for a truly international body of that kind. I shall try to explain by giving some examples of fields and activities where, in my eyes—the eyes of a retired librarian and a retired vice-president of IFLA—improvements would be possible.

1. To begin with: the financial situation is very unsatisfactory. Without UNESCO's subvention, which makes the existence of the permanent secretariat possible, it would be hopeless. Thankful as IFLA may be for this financial aid, it is absolutely necessary to seek out other financial resources. First of all IFLA will have to search its own heart. The annual dues payable by its members are computed by the executive board on a scale which is at present fixed at a rate between 25 and 50 Swiss centimes for each member of the association or on a basis of 5 to 10 per cent of the receipts from membership dues of the associations. With such figures before our eyes we do not wonder that the income of IFLA is so low. With great satisfaction I heard at the last meeting in Rome that Dr. Bourgeois, who is acting treasurer after the resignation of Dr. Breycha-Vauthier, has plans for drastic changes on this point.

¹ Edward Carter, "The Birth of UNESCO's Library Programmes" in: *Med Boken som Bakgrunn. Festschrift til Harald L. Tveterås*. (Oslo: 1964), p. 192.

We have to keep in mind, however, that librarians are not wealthy and that the income from dues will hardly be sufficient even for the normal work of IFLA. In my opinion it is mainly for research in a special field, conferences of a special group or on a special subject, etc., that IFLA could get financial help, and it is advisable to study the possibilities in this connection.

2. The new statutes provide for international congresses to be held from time to time, but one may ask whether it is possible for IFLA to bring together a sufficient number of librarians from all parts of the world. A real world congress would be very crowded and would call for an enormous organization—and much money—if it will be of any use. Perhaps IFLA will have to look for another course of action. To quote again the presidential address in Rome: "While financial considerations make it really difficult to accomplish true world coverage, it should not be so difficult to provide the framework within which a world organization could function. The ultimate future of IFLA may well be a series of regional groups, similar perhaps to the Latin-American Regional Section founded in 1962, each with its own organization and meetings. . . . It is, of course too early to attempt to forecast what these future regions might be. We already have the Latin-American Regional Section I have mentioned; we have been asked by UNESCO to take steps which might lead to an African section and I should very much like to see the Asian Federation of Library Associations, which held its inaugural meetings in Tokyo in 1957, brought into active participation in the work of IFLA."

On the whole I agree with these words, though I wonder how well these regional sections would function. I also wonder what the financial consequences for IFLA would be. At any rate such sections might not expect financial aid of any importance from IFLA. I am also afraid that Sir Frank is much too opti-

mistic when he thinks that the regional sections could come together periodically, thus fulfilling the expectation laid down in the present statutes of IFLA of a world congress every few years.

Personally I would prefer to bring about special conferences for particular groups of librarians, such as university librarians, medical librarians, or children's librarians. One could also think of conferences on special subjects such as union catalogs, library buildings, legal deposit, and coordinated acquisition. In many countries it would presumably be fairly easy to obtain adequate government grants for the purpose of arranging such special conferences which certainly would be much more profitable than one or two committee meetings at the annual sessions of IFLA. This would imply a much needed unloading of the agenda of these sessions.

3. In connection with this it will be unavoidable to consider a change in the yearly sessions. Many new and young librarians now come to IFLA's meetings expecting to learn something, to hear interesting lectures, to take part in stimulating discussions. What they find are mostly general meetings of a formal character, filled with oratory and administrative matters and section and committee meetings, sometimes poorly prepared and administered. They are interested in various subjects treated in these meetings, but they find that often much time is wasted so that there is no discussion at all. This is the more disappointing, as necessarily many committee meetings take place at the same time, so that they can attend only two or three of them. IFLA shall have to give serious consideration to whether or not its sessions should have more the character of a congress than before. It shall have to consider a restriction in the number of committees or an extension in length of the sessions and more variety on the agenda. IFLA made a good start in this respect in Rome, where in a plenary meeting four experts delivered lec-

tures on libraries in newly developing countries and in special meetings where such subjects as reprography and mechanization were discussed.

4. A very important question is how to organize the sessions of IFLA and more especially the meetings of sections and committees. Many times we have seen presidents read aloud the texts of papers which could have been distributed, or, worse still, were already in the hands of the audience. Often delegates use practically all the time available for a committee meeting for the reading of their own report leaving no time to other delegates for discussion. Though the president has recommended strongly to all the sections and committees that they go again and again to the long-term program to identify the broad tasks which have now been tackled, it was hard to discover in many committee meetings that this advice was followed.

All the same there is no question but that in view of the reception *Libraries in the World* has enjoyed it is now the right psychological moment to base further study and discussions on this document. If as a result IFLA could publish reports on different actual problems I am sure it would be much appreciated by librarians all over the world.

Can such a thing be organized? The answer is an emphatic yes, but on condition that the work of sections and committees be better organized than they have been in the past. In the meeting of the Council in Madrid in 1958 the Scandinavian librarians brought before the Council a document with recommendations regarding the work of the sections and committees. It was asked in this document that reports from committees be submitted to the national associations at least four months before the session of the Council and that resolutions of national associations regarding these reports have been received by the secretariat at least two weeks before the session,

so that duplicated copies could be available before the session. In 1964 the realization of these wishes is still a long way off. Perhaps they ask a little too much as far as the period of four months is concerned, but on the whole these demands are fully justified. The experience in Rome made it quite clear that some direction as to the presiding of the meetings would not be superfluous. It stands to reason that a constant consultation of the president and the general secretary with the presidents and secretaries of the sections and committees is necessary. I know that one has to face such a thing as human weakness, but this should never be an argument for letting matters take their own course.

5. It is very desirable that IFLA make its name and work known through publications. The *Guide to Union Catalogues and International Loan Centers* is completely exhausted. The English edition of the long-term program *Libraries in the World* will soon be out of print. Such publications make IFLA better known than the somewhat traditional *Actes*. Why not bring some method into the editing of the national reports and publish them as a separate annual volume?

These are only some wishes; many others could be added. However the above-mentioned items make it clear that much organizational work is still to be done by IFLA. In the session in Rome revisions of the statutes proposed by the executive board were adopted. One of the principal changes is to reduce the size of the executive board so as to allow for at least two meetings between sessions of the Council. It is hoped that this executive board will be a working group active and flexible enough to be a real help to the permanent secretary in executing IFLA's policy. I cannot do better than end this paper by extending my best wishes to the new executive board in the performance of its difficult task. ■ ■