

# The Publishing Scene

David Dempsey

**The Arkville Press** consists of two officers, fifteen published books, no full-time employees, a deficit and a millionaire backer. It has a friend at Bankers Trust and is programmed at the Columbia University Graduate School of Business. The books are sold by The Free Press, which in turn is owned by Crowell-Collier-Macmillan. Complicated? Not by modern publishing standards. But it does remind us of the old anatomy song: the shin bone is connected to the knee bone, the knee bone to the thigh bone, the thigh bone to the hip, and so on. Except in this case, Arkville isn't very hip. Its major function is to publish books on the role of the American corporation in modern society.

The unusual thing about Arkville is that it has persuaded a number of these large corporations to help underwrite the Press's annual budget. In a sense, this parallels the efforts of Arts Councils throughout the country to get "business" money for cultural purposes. (A sizable proportion of the \$27 million funneled through the National Council on the Arts in 1968 came as gifts from corporations.) If Arkville expands its list to include poetry and books on general cultural subjects, as it plans someday to do, corporate subvention will hopefully be phased out, but at present, as Director Richard Eells points out, the money is a pump-priming operation designed to get Arkville moving. U.S. Steel, Bankers Trust Co., and Standard Oil of New Jersey were among the first sponsors, back in 1965, and the blue-chip angels have since increased to fifteen; IBM, for example, has just committed itself to a seven-year grant totaling \$35,000. In addition, five private foundations have added their support.

It takes a financial genius to think of something like this, and such a man was at hand in Armand G. Erpf, general partner of Loeb, Rhoades & Co., who got a taste of publishing as chairman of the executive committee of Crowell-Collier-Macmillan, went on to invest in *Atlas* and *New York Magazine*, and is now president of Arkville. Parenthetically, it is Erpf who is credited with reviving the moribund Crowell-Collier Co., combining it with Macmillan, and boosting annual sales from \$28 million to \$400 million in just ten years.

But there's no use being a publisher if you can't lose money, too—at least in a good cause—and Erpf started Arkville as a "loss" corporation. The name comes



from Arkville, N.Y., up in the Rip Van Winkle country of Delaware County, where Erpf maintains a home. An old building, circa 1800, has been purchased as a headquarters and will be remodeled for future use. In the meantime Director Eells, who is Adjunct Professor at Columbia's Graduate School of Business, works out of his university office and his apartment. Columbia has put its imprimatur on the project by setting up a Studies of the Modern Corporation to oversee the editorial work, and it also acts as trustee for the corporate gifts.

Officially, the publications are "designed to stimulate inquiry, research, criticism and reflection. They fall into four categories: works by outstanding businessmen, scholars and professional men; prizewinning doctoral dissertations relating to the corporation; annotated and edited selections of business literature; and business classics that merit republication." Probably the most widely noted—and quoted—of the books to date is Daniel P. Moynihan's *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*.

The "studies" are far from being an apologetics for corporation behavior, and one book (*The Political Imperative: The Corporate Character of Unions*) is written by Gus Tyler of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. Erpf says frankly that neither the universities nor business executives really know much about the modern corporation; the former are too far from the woods, and the latter too close to the trees. "In view of the enormous morass of ignorance about the methodology of modern business, we thought it important to put some light on it," Erpf explains.

He also sees Arkville as a counterforce to John Kenneth Galbraith, who he believes has given business a bad name. Yet the project makes no attempt at "image building" for the corporation, or

promoting the company histories so beloved of trade publishing. "Our sponsors are surprised to find that their names are not even mentioned in the books," Professor Eells says.

Beautifully designed and printed, they are far above the average in appearance. On a budget of about \$125,000 a year, the venture is still a shoestring operation as these things go; but it's a golden shoestring, and, as a way of getting business to pay for its own examination as a force in American life, an innovation in publishing as well.

**For those to whom innovation** is all, we draw attention to the latest example of electronic publishing, the new *Annals of America*, a six-years-in-the-making, computer-set, twenty-volume, million-dollar project sponsored by the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Edited by Mortimer Adler and Charles Van Doren, the *Annals* contains more than 2,000 historical documents by some 1,200 authors, ranging from Columbus to Martin Luther King, Jr., plus a two-volume conspectus of "Great Issues in American Life," a bibliography, cross references and much, much more.

The secret of the *Annals*—and their prime selling point—is that you don't have to "look things up." On the contrary, you leave this to a computer in Chicago, merely sending in your order for whatever material you want assembled. In due time a custom-made "book" comes back to you which has been retrieved, quite possibly, from all twenty volumes. Indeed, our first thought was why own the set at all? Why not just establish a direct line to the computer service? Alas, inspection of the sales literature indicates that this is not possible.

The Britannica people point out that the *Annals* is "the first large set of reference books ever conceived for electronic composition and publishing" and that "it is pointing the way toward a more versatile publishing industry." What this will do for general trade publishing—novels, for example—we can't say. Our guess is, not very much. But the advantages of the electronic availability of educational material is obvious, and the *Annals* underwent field trials in several schools before being published in its final form. As now programmed, the *Annals* invites an educator to select any combination of subjects in the areas of history, social studies, and political science, and have them "packaged" for his class. It's a little like computer dating.

Since retrieval costs money (the amount depends upon the number of pages), schools and college will doubtless form the largest market for the *Annals*. But there is no reason why individuals can't buy the set (at \$149.50), ignore the computer, and use it as an old-fashioned sourcebook in U.S. history.

# Hope's Candidate

**The Choices**, by Norman Thomas (*Ives Washburn*, 85 pp. \$3.50), contains the socialist leader's last prescription for his country, written shortly before his death. Spencer Pollard is a professor of economics at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and the author of "How Capitalism Can Succeed."

By SPENCER POLLARD

IN THIS SLENDER BOOK Norman Thomas calls himself "one of those who desire to wash the flag, not burn it." He wants to wash out poverty, racism, pollution, false advertising, and the notion that our manifest destiny is to be the world's policeman. He wants our patriotism to include support for population control, the negative income tax, and community planning with the participation of the plannees. Someday, he hopes, we shall have a pledge of allegiance to a United Nations powerful enough to administer world law based upon social justice and fraternity. And, further on in time, he would like the government to own the "commanding heights" of the economy—the natural resources, the system of money, banking and credit, and the great monopolies and oligopolies.

Except for the "further on" part of the prescription there is little to this "socialist" program that most Americans would consider dangerously radical today. Since the 1920s and early 1930s, when he was arrested numerous times for arguing for the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively, there has been a convergence between Norman Thomas and the United States.

*The Choices* covers so thin a slice of time that it does not convey how much of the convergence has been on Thomas's part. The book needs to be read with a thicker one, Murray Seidler's *Norman Thomas: Respectable Rebel* (second edition, Syracuse University Press, 1967), which shows the changes in Thomas's ideas from his earliest days, his gradual softening toward the United States, and his growing appreciation of the virtues it has along with its faults.

Thomas has nothing good to say about today's militant young rebels:

The destruction of the established order in the United States probably can be achieved by dedicated violence on the part of a minority of our population, but as with all other revolutions, there will be no guarantee—quite the reverse—of progress toward utopia.

This violence has already taken savage forms. For example, during riots there have been incidents of deliberate sniping at firemen who are trying to save lives. Who would like to live under the kind of government achieved by this sort of criminality?

But, as usual, Thomas finds it impossible to despair:

Not for a minute do we need to assume that the human race is irrevocably damned. With this in mind, I find much satisfaction in remembering that the Scandinavians, who have achieved the most intelligent form of social institutions, are the descendants of the wild and cruel Vikings.

We may suspect that it was this same incurable hopefulness that led Thomas to notice an important turning point in the history of capitalism:

In the wars through which I have lived, appeals for peace have always been accompanied by more or less extensive drops on the stock market. However, this was not the case when President Johnson first surprised the world by agreeing to at least start negotiations. Stock prices soared on Wall Street.

Capitalism was good to Thomas. His wife, Frances Stewart, was the granddaughter of a partner of John Jacob Astor, and she brought to the marriage, along with deep social sympathies and competence in raising a large family while her husband was often away crusading, a splendid amount of shining old capitalist money. Thomas could afford to spend his life working against capitalism and its "grotesque inequalities, conspicuous waste, gross exploitation, and unnecessary poverty."

Thomas had legions of friends and admirers from all groups and levels of the population, but he thought this was compatible with his goals. He once said, "Uneasy as I am about being spoken of too well by too many men, I don't feel I'm obliged to go out and smash somebody's window to prove that I'm not respectable."

The enemies Thomas chose for himself were as interesting a group as his friends. He hated Lenin and Stalin for installing socialism in Russia without democracy, and he held Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt in deep contempt for getting us into wars and for believing that democracy was possi-

ble without socialism. He shook his head sadly over the path taken by some former socialists who joined the Union for Democratic Action (which later became the Americans for Democratic Action). To Reinhold Niebuhr, then chairman of UDA, he wrote a long open letter protesting the organization's support for Franklin Roosevelt in the wartime election of 1944. This provoked a reply from Niebuhr containing the celebrated sentence, "Let me say at once that the Union for Democratic Action long ago abandoned the 'utopia or bust' position in politics."

His socialist fundamentalism was perhaps Thomas's only important fault. He was fond of the old slogan contrasting capitalism's "production for profit" with socialism's "production for use." But experience has taught us that, if under capitalism most production is for profit, then under socialism production is for power—the power of those who control the socialized areas of the economy. In either case, it takes a great deal of countervailing power in the hands of other groups in society to make sure that profit-seekers and power-seekers are motivated to production for public use as the socially acceptable way to achieve their own personal goals.

At the age of sixty-eight, Thomas indicated that the voice of experience had at last spoken to him on this issue. In an article in the *Socialist Call* for November 14, 1952, he wrote:

The messianic hope which consciously or unconsciously inspired most of us to become socialists is scarcely tenable in America or elsewhere in the world. . . . History and our better knowledge of our human psychology have destroyed or profoundly altered that particular scheme of earthly salvation. We have learned much about the temptations of power, and we know that there is no messianic working class or any sort of elite that we can trust automatically to save mankind. . . . There never will be an absolute victory.

In his long political life Norman Thomas ran for mayor of New York twice, for governor once, and for President of the United States six times. Our nation was thrice blessed in that he campaigned so often, always spoke his mind, and never won. It would be a tribute to him for his admirers to buy this book, his last testament. Its slenderness reflects a faith in the youth of this country in the spirit of Whitman's lines to young poets:

I myself but write one or two indicative words for the future . . .  
Leaving it to you to prove and define it,  
Expecting the main things from you.