

M I S C E L L A N E O U S

INTERNATIONAL BOOK YEAR

"Books for All" is the motto for 1972 which UNESCO has proclaimed "International Book Year". The Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. René Maheu, had this to write on the subject:

... If International Book Year must be, above all, a national effort within each country, aimed at mobilizing energies and resources and sparking off concrete initiatives, it must also be a vast movement of international co-operation.

In view of the immense needs of the developing countries, governments and bodies administering bilateral or multilateral aid programmes should make available to these countries the necessary technical and financial assistance to promote national book production and distribution. . . .

But International Book Year is above all the concern of the millions of ordinary people for whom reading books is part of their daily occupation, or a means of personal enlightenment or a source of escape and reverie—in a word, inseparable from happiness and the dignity of living.

Let us all work and act together to make "Books for All" a reality for all.

The purpose of this vast campaign is to draw the public's attention to the role that books play in society and to touch off a chain of events, the repercussions of which, it is hoped, will extend way beyond 1972. The Courier¹ draws attention to books and their importance in developing countries. In this vein, an Indian specialist in mass communication media, has this to say:

... To us in the developing countries who have not yet partaken fully of what life has to offer, there is a vested interest in its continuation; so also in the media (of which the book is one) as vehicles for passing on of stored knowledge and new information to our young people.

¹ UNESCO, Paris, January 1972.

MISCELLANEOUS

... We know that the nature of the " transcript of society " has generally moved from oral to print. The developing countries are at this stage. They are aware of the fact that the printed transcript is available now. Also that such transcript can enable the younger generation in these countries to expose themselves to the history and culture of their own people even as the generations before them.

The advantages of the print medium and of books are too well known to be taken up here at any length in such a short discussion. Print can provide the required knowledge at a time when the young people are ready for it and when they are in the mood to expose themselves to such transcripts. That time is now. In a more specific sense, print media can be " consumed " when a person wants to—and at the speed at which he is able to learn. He can go back to it if he needs to. . . .

... These young people are also aware of the fact that the knowledge of their cultures as well of other cultures is available to them in the books in the libraries which are accessible to them and from which they can more easily retrieve the particular information they are looking for. Figures on library usage conclusively prove that the largest number of their users are young people. This is only partly the result of their immediate educational needs. . . .

We should, in this respect, remember that the ICRC plays its part in propagating culture and high moral principles through the printed medium. It publishes books and periodicals, such as the International Review, which find their way round the world. Another excellent example of this is the preparation and publication by the hundreds of thousands of the school textbook The Red Cross and My Country together with the accompanying Teacher's Manual. These textbooks are distributed in schools in developing countries while our Soldier's Manual is supplied to members of the armed forces in many countries.

In this case, printed matter is used as a vehicle for principles which help our suffering brethren. It is broadly distributed, with the help of Ministries of Education and National Societies, and it enables us to spread knowledge of the principles of the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions.