

SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT ACTUALITIES IN HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY - LIBRARIES

By

AURÉL HENCZ

Librarian, University Library Szeged

The library-law of 1956 had a great influence on the development of the Hungarian university-libraries as well as on that of all types of libraries in our country. Essentially, until then Hungarian library-matters were unorganized. There were some special decrees covering the single parts of the whole domain, but there was no law which would have governed all the library-work of the country.

It is understood that sound library-work does not depend on the quality of legal regulations. The work of libraries is a function of the social and economic order of the country. The library is a social structure serving in every age definite purposes. It cannot get out of touch with life and the society surrounding it. It lives in society, and social, cultural, scientific and economic life claim its services. There is no library independent of everyday life, be it a general public library, or a highly specialized one.

Nevertheless, the general regulations involving all libraries in the country, the issue of appropriate decrees is not indifferent from the point of view of library-work of today, as well as from that of the work which is done to prepare the library for future tasks, and from the viewpoint of well-adjusted library-organization. It should be emphasized once more that good library-work does not depend first of all on decrees, but it must be realized that the organizational legal rules may either further or hinder library-work and development of library-life in a decisive manner.

Hence the above-mentioned library rules are important for Hungarian university-libraries, too. On the basis of this

law the Ministry of Public Education issued in 1956 a decree containing the rules of organization of university- and college-libraries.

This decree is very important. First of all: it incorporates the library — *qua* scientific institution — into the university. It emphasizes particularly that it represents an organic part of the organization of the university. But within the latter it gives the library sufficient independence so that it may assist the work of the university most efficiently.

It considers the university-library as an integrated whole. The university-library is the central library and the centre of the network of all the institute-libraries. It is the central library which controls the whole library-stock of the university, keeps it in evidence in its catalogues, and governs the institute-libraries, too, without separating them from the institutes.

Thus in my opinion our case the debate was well settled. First it was made clear that the university-library mainly serves the purposes of university-life, it is a university-institution; and in accordance with the legal decree, the University-library is an integrated whole.

Our university-libraries as well as our universities do not hold themselves aloof from life surrounding them, the development and construction of the future. The problems of Hungarian economic and cultural life are of vital interest to the universities and their libraries, and this is only natural. The scientific life of the university is part of the scientific life of the country, and so it is but natural that the scope of its library is a small but important part of the whole of Hungarian scientific life.

The life of our university-libraries is influenced by the economic and political life of the country, by Hungarian scientific life, and by the scientific life of a given university. The problems of the university-library do not either present themselves in a detached manner incoherently and at random. The library has to comply with the requirements of life; development sets day by day new task, new problems; while solving these problems we often meet with difficulties. In an attempt to find the best method of solving the problems sometimes we meet with success, sometimes we make mistakes; but essentially we are making progress all the time, and are serving the entire scientific life of our country always with increasing vigour and with ever better results.

At the present time the world is more or less divided into two separate parts: into those of bourgeois and socialist societies. This involves that their libraries serve two different

societies. But, all the same — and this is something we librarians cannot emphasize often enough — scientific life can have but one aim in the most differing parts of the world: to make life — and not only the future but also the life of today — better, more beautiful, freer, happier, and richer. There may be and there really are substantial differences of opinion about the fundamental object of life among the people, living in countries belonging to the two different regimes dominating the world. But the above-mentioned duties of the libraries are essentially the same. We librarians see this very well, and if we realize it we can also strive after our aims.

The problems arising in different parts of the world, the great and common ambitions of scientific life can best be seen in the big libraries of the respective countries. Therefore, it is not a question of mental compromise when we librarians advocate an intensive collaboration in scientific life and try to accomplish it within our sphere of interest.

This is the manner we university-librarians in which consider our work and our life. We have our own problems and worries, but our new organizational structure, the role which is guaranteed to us in the scientific life of our university and our country, the place we now occupy in the library-life of our country give us great chances. And we are making good use of them. And it was these chances which were made institutional by the above-mentioned legal decree.

The questions we have solved in recent years and those which are now going to be solved in the near future, similarly the questions we are as yet only discussing (disagreeing often about the best way of their solutions, searching during our discussions the best way to solve them) may be of interest to our university-library-colleagues all over the world, we think.

As of all community-functions, organization is a *»Conditio sine qua non«* of library-life. Without it there is no systematic, planned work. Until recently there was no uniform organization worth speaking of in our university-libraries. Work was carried on without a unified system. The system in question depended either on the leaders of the university, or, as in most cases, on the overall, perhaps well-considered, or perchance not properly understood concepts of the head-librarian. Therefore, every change in the person of the head-librarian could cause a crisis because the new leader could change the system in accordance with his own ideas or, if there was no perceptible system at all, could let the work go on by fits and starts without any extraordinary consequences.

Today our university-libraries have an up to date organization. As I stated above, they are an organic part of the whole »*universitas*«; nevertheless they are independent institutions and have sufficient independence so that they might work more freely and more successfully to further the interests of the university. Their organization is firmly established. Every library has its own rules of function which are sanctioned by their higher authorities. These are, indeed, statutes that contain all their obligations and rights. We know very well that these problems were not only ours. The library-publications of former decades show that they were problems on a world-scale. The universities did not always consider the libraries their own, they did not see or did not duly recognize the necessity and the work of the libraries. Some Rectors may have recognized the value and significance of the library, but then there was always some danger of the rector's using the library in a one-sided, manner as a means of furthering his own scientific studies.

The former University-Library-Committee was— this may be considered as a generally valid fact— in most countries an unpopular institution, especially with librarians. It did not duly support library-work. In most cases it was rather patronizing. Our new organization makes the library a part of the university-organization, but endows it with appropriate independence. It makes the library an independent faculty which is interwoven with the other faculties. This is also demonstrated by small but nevertheless essential formalities. The library-committee considering it in the old sense of the word exists no longer. Instead of it we have now the »Scientific Council of the University-Library«. The Council is a link between the university and its library. The duty of the Council is this: to harmonize the work of the library with the educational and scientific work of the university. Our new legislation states *expressis verbis*: that it is council's duty to support the director of the library, acting as an advisory body. The task of the council is therefore not the patronizing of the director; the council is to advise and help him in his work. The president of the council is the director of the library, the members are representatives of the faculties who must, incidentally, be professors, and the proxy of the rector.

The reorganization of the committee was, naturally, not a single day's work. It may honestly be stated that the extinction of the old library-committee took place gradually, and after the second world-war, it was resurrected only in a few places and exhibiting there too only a very vague kind of organization and function. Of course, the creation of the

new-type of council was preceded by a contest on questions of principle. Public opinion within the university had to be convinced that a council so constituted (and only so) would be able to further the scientific and educational work of the university much more satisfactorily and do at the same time more creative work. The new councils were established in 1956—1957, and thus they have only just begun their work. However, their start is reassuring.

It is also essential in our organization that besides the representatives of the faculties, the director of the library is now also a member of the Senate of the University. This is important from many points of view. The fact in itself increases the importance and appreciation of the university-library and its essential significance; apart from this merely formal point: the library-director is kept more fully informed about university-life, he is in constant touch with the chief consultative body of the university, takes an active part and exerts his influence at the conferences, furthermore has means and ways to reveal the fundamental actual problems of the university-library to the leaders of the university and is able to gather information or to ask for assistance, to gain insight into the politics of science, scientific and educational problems to the interest of which the library should be devoted enabling him to participate in deciding the demands made of the library at meetings of the Senate of the University. The library-director comes into direct contact with the leading persons of the university and the faculties; by his presence and by expert knowledge of his work he is able to make the institution led by him more respected.

The rules grant the library-director the right to partake in the discussion, but do not invest him with the right to vote. This may perhaps be interpreted as a convenient state of affairs: why should he have to play an active part in certain controversies? But we Hungarian librarians are all of the opinion that the library-director should be entitled to the same rights as any other member of the Senate of the University. The work of the library is interwoven with the whole life of the university; thus it is not indifferent to us whether we define our attitude in contested matters; we wish to express it.

Spheres of authority must be outlined with exactitude in every organization. Our Library regulations involve the relationship of university and university-library. The rights of the rector as well as the rights of the library-director are determined precisely. It is just this exact outlining of rights and obligations which helps to achieve a perfect understanding between the university and the director of the university-

library. Otherwise, effective work would be impossible. The university-library would have to accommodate itself to the different ideas of every new rector, and thus it would not be able to fulfil its most important function, non-discriminatingly equal service of every faculty in the university equally.

How to accomplish best our network-system-functions is the most serious among our tasks. As I mentioned above the new decree regards the whole university-library matter as a unity. The libraries of the institutes are consequently branch-libraries, parts of the central library. We must therefore aim at managing books, etc., in these libraries in essentially the same manner, although perhaps in slightly simpler form, — as in the expert and careful management of the central stock of the university-library. This is no easy problem and cannot be solved overnight. But that any solution of the question should be possible, the statute had to establish the fact that the institute-libraries are to form a homogenous network, the center of which should be the university-library. Today our greatest concern is to find the best solution to this problem.

The number of library-workers at Hungarian university-libraries has increased during recent years. There are university-libraries the staff of which has doubled since 1939. However, it must be born in mind that previously the staff of the university-libraries was small and that unsolved problems have piled up. Hence, so far it was impossible to solve all these problems in a satisfactory way in spite of the fact that the number of the library-personnel has increased. But the solving of these problems does not depend altogether on how many persons the staff consists of. First of all, the questions have to be elucidated in principle because only after this can the conditions of solving them, both objective and subjective ones, be put forward. There is the problem of the institute-libraries. Now we are again referring to the observations concerning scientific reviews and journals in foreign countries. The place of the institute-libraries in the organization of the university is not yet clear in many countries. This question is settled in principle in our country. We Hungarian university-librarians think that the only right solution of the problem is that the institute libraries should be guided by us. This naturally doesn't mean that we want to oust the professor. Quite on the contrary: the management of the library must have the approval of the head of the Institute the professor and his moral support. But where does professional guiding begin and where does it end?! Realization of practical problems makes it urgent and necessary, that principles and methods of management should be worked out. Opinions differ. Some

think it necessary to centralize everything: from the procuring of books to their arrangement in the institute-library they want every phase to be done by staff of the central library. The other extreme is that the function of staff in the central library should be only the giving of some advice, instruction, in matters of principle. At present we have only to reach an agreement in principle and need not take into account financial and staff-possibilities in general. We have to come to a decision which would make it unnecessary to take up the question and discuss it once more after a satisfactory increase in staff and its suitable distribution. It is the writer's point of view in this question that there are two sides to this argument, an economic and a professional one. Undoubtedly they cannot be altogether separated. It seems to be beyond doubt that the procuring of books and the administration connected with this has to remain in the hands of the institutes. But the central library has to help them in the procuring of books and at the same time has to exercise co-ordinating control. It is scarcely possible today to trace the results of the bookproduction of the world. This makes it necessary to co-ordinate the bookorderings of the institutes, and to discuss with the institutes concerned whether it is imperative that the same book should be included in the libraries of several institutes, duplicated. Of course, most of the technical books in institute-libraries are hand-books. But there are a considerable number of books one copy of which would be enough of the whole university. Institutes often order these books only because they don't know that an other institute-library has already obtained it. Hence at the stage of ordering the opinion of the institute is decisive, in order to utilize departmental credit in the best possible way, however the central library must co-ordinate orders of the different institutes. The central library has to consider whether certain books should be procured only by central library, or only by institute-libraries, or by both. Thus the procuring of books should be a collective effort. The incorporation, and processing must — in my opinion — be done by the institute-libraries. The stock-listing must thus be done in the institutes and by each institute separately. On the other hand the registration of the title, the classification, the writing of the catalogue-cards is the duty of the central library. The catalogues of the central library should contain also the library-stock of the institutes. The institutes in turn have to prepare an institute-catalogue of their own library-stock — using the catalogue-cards placed at their disposal by the central library. This does not involve any particular difficulties as every institute-library gets duplicated catalogue-cards readymade. It seems

desirable that every faculty should have a faculty-catalogue, too, or at least an author-catalogue of the library-stock of all the institute-libraries within the faculty, so that the institutes might be able to gather information about the books in stock at the different institutes of their own faculty, without the help of the central library.

It is, of course, much easier to set down principles than to carry them out in practice. In most of the institute-libraries the method of handling library-stock is not up to date. Thus two tasks should be elaborated first; the recataloguing to old institute-library-stock, and the continuous processing of newly procured books. In the whole country there should be about 2 million books and periodicals to be recatalogued.

The revealing of institute-library-stocks will thus also be very important from a national point of view. Many books which are at present concealed in institute-libraries will come into library-circulation, they will be registered in the central national catalogue as well, so that each book of each institute-library will be accessible to every research-worker of the country. Moreover, a great number of new books will be available for international exchange, too.

The library-decree also contains measures to limit the subjects of collection in the different libraries of the country. From this the obligation arises that every library should enlarge its stock by procuring publications pertaining to its theme of collection. In connexion with the collection-theme the decree contains no detailed dispositions but leaves this to the individuals competent to decide, and the administrative authority. With due regard to the duties and limitations of collection, according to the decree, the system of Hungarian library organization is as follows:

1. national library
2. general scientific and special scientific libraries
3. general educational libraries
4. school-libraries.

The general scientific and the special scientific libraries are further divided into:

- a) national scientific libraries with general interests of collection,
- b) special national scientific libraries,
- c) highly specialized scientific libraries,
- d) special libraries of local character.

The Minister of Education has the authority to make allocations to university-libraries in accordance with their sphere of collection-interest. University-libraries are classified

into the group of national scientific libraries with a general sphere of collection. In consequence of this qualification the importance of the university-libraries and their role in the scientific life of the country has increased, and this has been duly expressed. National scientific libraries with general collections must function only within the framework of a scientific institution the work of which touches upon the whole scientific life of the country; these may claim any notable publication dealing with the basic sciences. But some of the libraries have special duties, too. For instance in certain branches of science the library of the university in Budapest functions as a special scientific library. The libraries of the provincial universities must besides their spheres of collection also perform the duties of a regional library in certain parts of the country.

The decree regulating the questions mentioned above has been issued recently. The carrying out of the order is in progress. This is, of course, continuous, progressive work. At any rate, this characteristic determines and influences the whole basic function of the library, since the university-libraries are entitled to obtain all basic published scientific material. To carry out this disposition in a consistent manner a corresponding credit had to be granted. In the history of the Hungarian university-libraries this is the first instance that provincial university-libraries have also been declared national scientific-libraries, and that the actual situation which developed in recent years — namely that the provincial university-libraries perform particular tasks in the special scientific life of the region — has been acknowledged. The Hungarian university-libraries have to adopt a well-planned overall policy for the acquisition of library-material to be able carry out this duty satisfactorily.

According to the decree the library-networks with identical duties — as for instance the library-networks of each single university — have to organize an interdependent bibliothecal committee. This committee has to bring into harmony the work of all these university-libraries. It has to assure well-planned cooperation, the thorough discussion of the actual problems of the university-libraries, and it should be able to present a uniform standpoint towards the respective governing authorities with reference to this emphatically underlined questions. It is this committee which has to coordinate the just claims of the university-libraries. It is part of the network-scheme that the university-library in Budapest arranges some bookorders of the other libraries centrally. But the network-committee assumes also a point of view in national library-questions; in general the networks have represent-

atives in the highest social organ of the Hungarian libraries, in the National-Library-Council, the primary duty of which is participation in the interest of co-operation between the library networks and libraries, and promote professional interests with suitable vigour and uniformity. As an advising organ of the Ministry of Education it influences Hungarian library-life and the way of its evolution in a decisive manner. Our university-libraries perform their inter-network-function by holding from time to time — generally every second month — a meeting of the head-librarians. At these conferences they discuss actualities, mostly questions which interest all the university-libraries, but also such which concern only one library, but in the solving of which other libraries are able to render effectual help. Naturally, they make decisions in questions of general national importance as well, and present suggestions to the competent bodies.

Technical supervision is also a means of helping and guiding. The highest organ of professional supervision is the Ministry of Education. It provides certain theoretical and practical services through technical inspectors. The inspectors are entrusted by the chief of the Library-department of the Ministry of Education to perform their work in accordance with the directions received from him. The aim of the inspectors' work is the promoting of successful work in the libraries, partly through professional guidance and expert control, partly by support of the theoretical guiding provided by the Library-Department. The establishment of an institution of technical supervision is of great significance for the university-libraries as well. The technical supervisors supply direct help to the university-libraries. The supervisor, visiting many libraries of the same type is able to recommend successful working-methods, introduced and found useful in some libraries, to other libraries of the same type. On the other hand, as regards the authorities, he will be an unprejudiced advocate of the unsolved problems of individual libraries. Moreover, government-departmental library-instructions are carried out more successfully by the technical inspectors than by the Ministry itself, as the Ministry uses the most outstanding practising librarians of the country for its departmental functions. This activation of the most eminent experts in librarianship exerts a very good influence on Hungarian library-life.

The scientific bibliothecal and bibliographic activity of the university-libraries adapts itself more and more to the universities' claims. They gather and publish bibliographies which are of great help in university-work and so contribute to better and more successful educational and research work. It is the duty of university-libraries to collect the

specialised work of university-workers, hold it in evidence, make it known and publish it. University-bibliography (so called) has a past of several decades abroad as well as in Hungary. During the war and in postwar-years the collection or rather the publication ceased. Hence in this respect the Hungarian libraries have urgent tasks to perform. Besides the collecting of the current material they must carefully gather older material as well. Some of our libraries considered the collection of the material of past years as their primary problem, others considered the bibliographic revealing of the new material as the most urgent task. The Hungarian university-libraries pursue a lively controversy about the compiling of this university-bibliography. At present this question is still far from being settled. Some are of the opinion that bibliographies should not be compiled, published respectively by every individual university, but should be coordinated and published as a joint (collective) publication of all Hungarian universities. Some even suggest that the bibliography should only include the publication reprints, printed matter relating to the universities and dissertations. In my opinion and in the opinion of many other librarians such a limitation on university-bibliography-work would not be right. The specific scientific work of university-workers and its bibliography are quite different from the above mentioned plan of university-bibliography and serve different purposes. The annual professional and scientific-bibliography serves two purposes: the first is to register the scientific work going on at the university and the second is to contribute to the spontaneousness of international scientific relations by reviewing the work of university-professors. These purposes cannot be so well promoted by a national bibliography. Every university-library has its special duties. One of these is to keep in evidence and record the specialized work of its professors. To deprive the individual university-libraries of this kind of bibliographic activity would mean that the bibliographic work of the libraries would lose their peculiar scope, and this would deprive them also of a means to intensify and promote the friendly relations between the university-professors and the library. More than one successful Hungarian library-publication of this kind has proved to be of great attraction to the universities of foreign countries which received these bibliographies favourably; and they have also proved to be useful exchange-material in international library-connections.

Here we must deal with the problem of international connections. The rupture of contact with all foreign libraries during the second world-war was almost complete. After the

war we had to find a new basis for these connections. In the course of the first few years the fundamental conditions for the work had to be created. Only after the reorganization which rendered more up-to-date work possible, could the libraries deal with the task of reconstructing and broadening their international connections. A great difficulty was that our libraries did not have publications which could have served as international exchange-material at their disposal. In the meantime the publications of our university-libraries reached a level making them suitable for exchange. More and more universities and university-institutes published year-books or *actas* which could also be used by the university-libraries as exchange-material. The exchange was also promoted by the evolution of Hungarian book-publishing. The elegant exterior and high standard of the subject matter of the Hungarian and specialized books printed in foreign languages is internationally acknowledged. These books rendered it possible to meet certain foreign demands through exchange. Our library-decree enables our university-libraries institutionally to establish direct international connections. Our university-libraries have established by now publication exchanges with nearly all more important university-libraries of the world. Our aim is that exchanges should not be restricted to issue-exchange only, but should be based on broader foundations. In this respect we already have some results worth mentioning. We have received valuable help from libraries in foreign countries as concerns specialized literature-research and have rendered similar services to many foreign libraries. We plan to issue common library-science and bibliographic publications. This study is essentially also a result of international co-operation. Our warm and genial international relations made it possible for some of our librarians to enjoy hospitality in different foreign countries. There are also great possibilities in this field. We want to establish permanent exchange-post for librarians. The exchange of views renders our mutual relations freer and more natural enhancing the result. The university-librarians of the different countries have many identical problems. The vast development of sciences always brings new problems to the surface which must be solved by librarians. The exchange of views will be very valuable regarding experiments with new library-methods and adoption of new library-techniques. It would be an essential result of this that the relations between university-librarians of different nations would become more intimate, more friendly and the co-operation between their libraries more productive.

Hungarian university-libraries have made great progress

during the last ten years. The evolution they have undergone can be measured by the role they are now playing in the library-life of the country. Besides the head-librarians, younger university-librarians also participate in the highest Hungarian organ, the National Library Council, and also in very different committees of experts. The isolation which was characterizing our university libraries for many decades, has vanished our university-librarians attempt to contribute efficiently to the solution of the most urgent library-problems and take an active part in the publishing of our professional library journal. This more lively, more dynamic activity of our university-librarians has a double significance: on the one hand, it promotes effectively the solution of the Hungarian library-problems, and, on the other, — and this should also be born in mind — it endows the university-library organization with greater appreciation within the whole Hungarian library-world, directing more attention to the problems to be solved by the university-library. The case of university-libraries has become a public affair today, and that it is so is due in no small degree to the fact that university-librarians have their representatives in the leading bodies of the library world and among the different committees of expert. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences has appointed an expert-committee, the duty of which is the study of questions concerning library-science. The representatives of university-libraries take part in the work of the committee as well.

The new organizational rule affecting the university-library enable librarians to do scientific work. If a librarian does appropriate scientific work, the library-director can grant him research-days. That means that on one, or on more than one day of the week, the librarian concerned is relieved from office-duties and is free to work on his theme. The competent bodies have not yet reached a decision to what kind of themes research-days may be permitted. On this subject the librarians themselves have not yet accepted a uniform attitude. Some think research-days should be granted only for the study of explicitly library-science subjects. The other extreme opinion is that research-days should be granted to the librarian, whatever the scientific subject he is working at. The right solution must be somewhere inbetween those extremes. It is clear that it would not be a sound proposition to restrict the scientific research-work within the library to the field of library-science alone. This would mean considering the question as being independent of university-life; a selfishly self-centred point of view, indeed. Librarians must be able to choose their themes freely from the different branches of

science and to have their research-days to work on them. But if the subject is not directly represented in the research-field of the university, the motivation of asking for research-day may be contested. The research-day is granted by the library-director, and it is his duty to see that it is appropriately utilised.

*

A new period of development opens now to our university-libraries. Our university-libraries using these possibilities try to solve the problems arising. Librarianship in our country is not isolated from librarianship in others. We have adopted and made use of many experiences in foreign libraries and have gladly given ours in return. Our colleagues in foreign countries — no doubt — see the progress we made in recent years with interest and pleasure. We hope that our international contacts and co-operation will in future be even more useful and will succeed in promoting the development of cultural and scientific life in our own country as well as in theirs.