

THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY IS HARD HIT BY INFLATION

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The crisis which Mexico's publishing industry is undergoing is also a cultural one. In recent years, writers such as Elena Poniatowska, José Emilio Pacheco and Carlos Monsivais have stressed that the industry's crisis affects the chances of improving secondary and higher edu-

cation. Books have become a luxury reducing access to scientific and cultural information. Recently, Monsivais remarked that book prices were a form of "implicit censorship" for those who need them. For Poniatowska, this crisis is an offense against one's right to read:

"it sabotages the country's own potential."

In 1982 the price of books published in Mexico rose 75 percent and imported books rose 150 percent. Between December 1987 and January of this year the cost of Fernando del Paso's latest book *Noticias del Imperio* increased by 25 percent while imports doubled in price. This means that, at present, an excellent novel such as Del Paso's costs a little more than the equivalent of four days wages at the current minimum wage, while a book by the Spanish publisher *Tusquest*, for example, can be purchased with five days' salary. Monsivais' words of 1985 are even more relevant today: "When inflation is as uncontrolled as ours, the most uncontrolled part of it hits books."

According to an analysis in the Integral Program for the Promotion of the Book Industry carried out by the Ministry of Trade and Industrial Development and by the Ministry of Education, the Mexican publishing industry has remained stagnant in the past three years mainly as a result of the shrinking domestic market. The report also states that the twenty leading publishers in the private sector have been unable to produce more than 33 million copies annually. It adds that although there is "no adequate information available" all seems to



Few buyers for expensive books. (Photo by José Fuentes)

Journalist.

indicate that the present number of publications in the industry "is below that reached in the period 1975-1980." An example of how far the publishing industry has actually declined in recent years is the drop in new titles by 33 percent between 1985 and 1986. During the same period the total number of publications—including reprints—of over one hundred companies fell 9.1 percent according to government statistics. Rogelio Carvajal, publishing director of *Grijalbo*, one of the 20 largest books publishers, notes that in 1987 the number of new editions published fell in relation to the previous year. "Preference was given to reprints when resources were allocated" because "rampant inflation compelled us to look at the more short-term and profitable market." Thus, last year, *Grijalbo* published 49 new titles, 88.3 percent less than its reprints.

Fewer New Titles

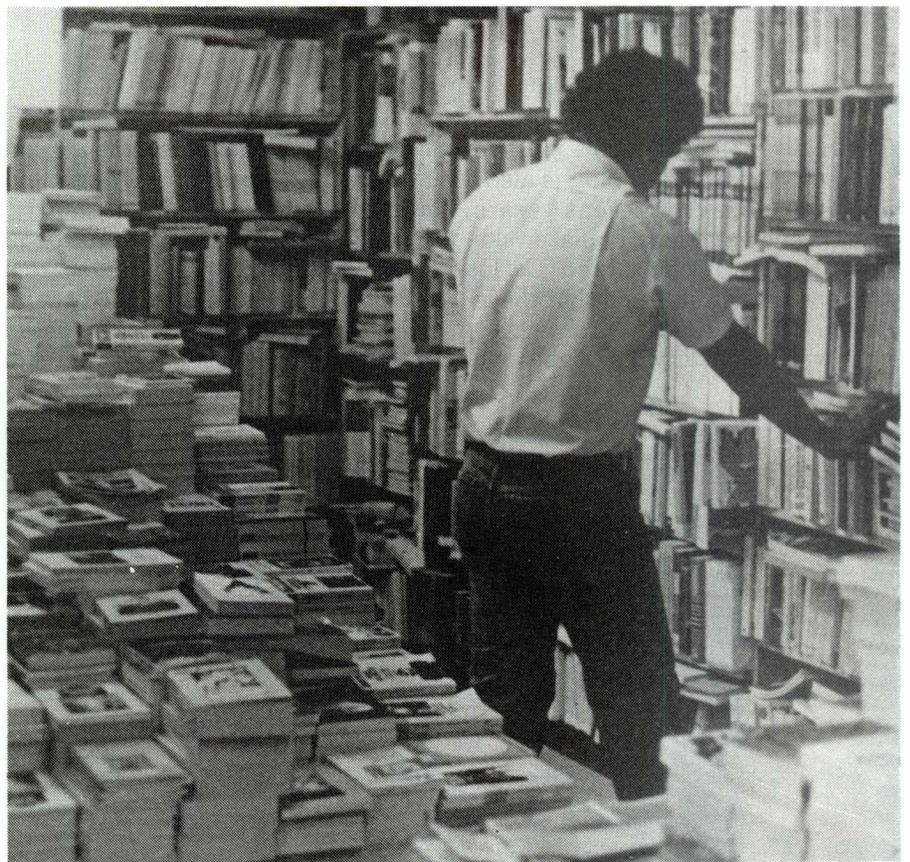
If there are fewer new editions this implies that, apart from lagging behind on information because of the high cost of books, we are also falling behind—even those of us who can afford new books—because publishers are producing fewer editions. In these times of crisis, companies do not want to take the risks involved in publishing new books by Mexican authors. And the value of the peso makes buying rights to foreign authors expensive. In 1976, 5,000 books were translated into Spanish. By 1985 the number of translations had greatly fallen, according to Guillermo Schavelzon, former director of the Center for the Promotion of Mexican Books.

Such problems have not escaped the *Fondo de Cultura Económica* (FCE) a publishing company found-

Terrés has stated that because of the lack of resources, the state-subsidized company will publish fewer young writers because "they are not profitable" and fewer older authors who do not bring in quick returns. "This is a serious problem because Paz and Fuentes were once young and we published their first books," explained García Terrés. The worst part of it all is that not even "profitable" authors can be published normally. García Terrés claims that in 1987, the latest book which Octavio Paz submitted was "vouched for with my Christmas' bonus and that of other top staff that's how we had to work". What

and Industrial Development show that in 1986 1,101 more titles were published in 1986 than in 1983. However, the figures for 1986 correspond to 108 publishers while those of 1983 correspond to 69 publishers. It should also be pointed out that in both cases a large number of the general production consisted of text and reference books and that although only 69 publishers were surveyed in 1983, in that year 4,194,704 more copies were printed than in 1986.

Another important publishing company, *Siglo XXI* has published approximately 1,800 titles with over 20 million copies. However, it



Widely read books. (Photo by José Fuentes)

Between 1982 and 1987, the price of paper in Mexico rose, 1,416 percent

ed in 1934 and considered to be one of Mexico's "indispensable" cultural institutions. Suffice it to say that the first books of writers such as Carlos Fuentes, Octavio Paz and Juan Rulfo were published by FCE. Its present director, Jaime García

has allowed the FCE to continue adding new titles is that it signed many contract "when it was still cheap to do so." And if this is what is happening to large publishers, smaller but by no means less important companies such as *El Ermitaño*, have had to cease production.

Data collected by the Committee for the Development of the Publishing Industry and the Book Trade, a subsidiary of the Ministry Trade

is still "undecided" about defining this year's publishing program because of the crisis. In 1982 it published 110 new books in collaboration with its affiliates in Colombia, Spain and Argentina, as opposed to only 70 last year. Since 1982 its leading affiliate, Mexico, has greatly reduced its production of new titles. Martín Soler, *Siglo XXI's* director attributes this serious decline in production to various causes. "From 1965 until now,

Books Printed and Bound in Mexico from 1983 to 1986

Year	New Books		Reeditions and Reprints		Total	
	Titles	Copies	Titles	Copies	Titles	Copies
1983	1,514	19,863,115	3,288	37,002,492	4,802	56,865,607
1984	2,123	20,412,993	5,403	42,162,821	7,526	62,575,814
1985	3,923	26,117,154	6,161	45,680,260	10,084	71,797,414
1986	2,615	26,923,397	6,556	46,905,082	9,171	72,828,479

Data taken from the Ministry of Trade and Industrial Development. Statistics correspond to the following number of publishing companies surveyed: 69 in 1983, 158 in 1984, 112 in 1985 and 108 in 1986.

annual sales have fallen 10 percent, author's royalties have risen 100 percent in dollars in the world market and there are continuous increases in the cost of paper and production." Between 1982 and 1987, the price of paper has gone up 1,416 percent. As a result of this, some claim that while paper constituted only one third of the production costs of a book in the early 1980s, now it is three quarters of production costs. The publishers, *Editorial Diana*, which underwent their worst crisis a few years ago, hope to publish at least half of the 280 new editions they issued in 1984, according to director José Luis Ramírez Cota. In spite of everything, Ramírez is optimistic because he believes that the company is back on its feet again.

Uncertain Future

There is constant uncertainty among publishers as to the number of books to be published in 1988 says Neus Espresate of *Era* publishers. "If things continue as they are production will be cut". Economic cutbacks have forced *Era* to reduce its new publications considerably. When compared to 1980, figures for 1985 show a drop of 53.3 percent.

"The fall in purchasing power and the high increase in costs have caused our sales to drop. When compared to 1986, last year's sales fell 10 percent but all this is not new, it has been going on for some time," observes Homero Gayosso, director of the *Grupo Editorial Planeta* which includes the publish-

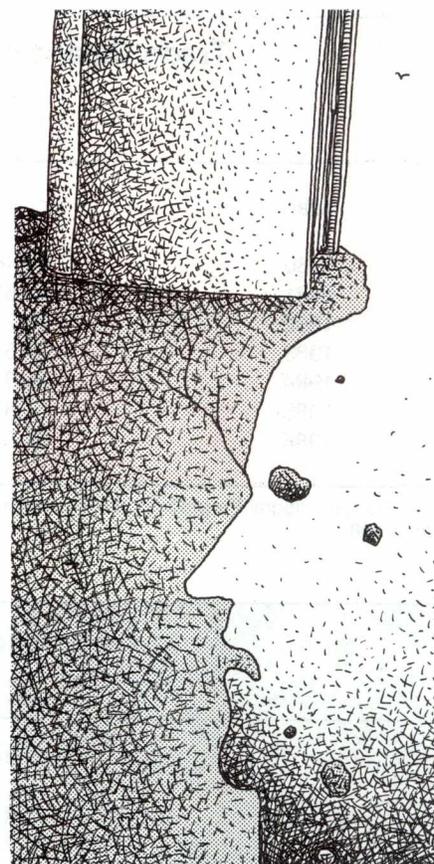
ers by the same name, *Seix Barral*, *Ariel* and *Joaquín Mortiz*. For Gayosso and his colleagues, exports are the "last hope" in this crisis. Because Mexico's economic crisis coincides with a similar crisis in the rest of Latin America, the market has diminished. Confronted with this situation, *Planeta* is seeking "to globalize production," that is, to publish jointly with companies in other countries in order to unify publications and lower reduce costs. "The idea is to publish in Mexico because, despite everything, it's cheaper here. The plan is already on foot, we'll start in Ecuador."

Soler, from *Siglo XXI*, is emphatic. "Publishers who do not export in the near future will have to close

At the beginning of the 1980s, the average number of copies per new title was 5,000 now it is 3,000

down." He warns however, that it is complicated business. "The program to provide incentives for export isn't working in the publishing industry. On the one hand, the Mexican government which needs the dollars we bring in, imposes restrictions on us for its benefit and, on the other, it is naturally interested in us exporting more. It's difficult to work like that."

According to government statistics, between 1981 and 1983 book imports fell 83 percent, while exports fell 50 percent. Between 1981



and 1986 imports dropped by 49.8 percent and exports 57.3 percent.

Another serious problem facing the book industry is production cuts, which have brought investments in machinery and equipment for graphic production to a severe halt. The figures speak for themselves: from 1981 to 1983 imports fell 84 percent and from 1981 to 1986 imports fell 70.4 percent. The long-term consequences of this situation, if measures are not introduced to remedy it, can easily be imagined.

State Publishers

Not all publishing companies are in private hands. Universities, cultural institutions, research centers and the Ministry of Education publish thousands of books annually.

The Ministry of Education, for example, has published 87 editions in the last five years with almost 32 million copies and this year it hopes to produce 389 in 19 series with approximately 17 million copies. The figures for 1988's publishing program are not definite because as of the first week in February the Ministry of Education's budget had still not been approved.

the 77 publications in 1987, this year will only see between 55 and 60.

The writer and director of the Literature department, Marco Antonio Campos, believes that joint publishing which the University has used since 1980 is one way of reducing costs. María Guadalupe Pérez, deputy director of publications at the Mexican Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT) adds that in joint publishing not only are costs shared with other institutions or publishers but the risks are also spread among the various parties.

For Antonio Campos joint

Campos is concerned that book prices in Mexico have risen faster than the general inflation rate. "I think this year they increased by over 200 percent." He adds, "areas which should receive most subsidies are the least subsidized." He seems optimistic about this year's sales because UNAM has a good stock of books, because UNAM's books are the cheapest on the market, and because university rector Jorge Carpizo's interest in improving distribution, sales "have gone up four or five times since he came in."

The National Polytechnic Institute is an important supplier of books for students since its Office

Trade Balance of the Publishing Industry and Graphic Arts			
(exclusively books)			
(value in thousands of dollars)			
Year	Imports	Exports	Balance
1980	96,469	45,887	(50,582)
1981	132,518	41,915	(90,603)
1982	95,215	36,850	(58,365)
1983	22,572	20,700	(1,872)
1984	33,812	21,231	(12,581)
1985	57,310	19,892	(37,418)
1986	66,559	17,893	(48,666)

Source: Integral Program for the Promotion of the Book Industry published by the Ministry of Trade and Industrial Development, Nov., 1987.

Machinery and Equipment Import for Graphic Arts Industry							
(value in thousands of dollars)							
Year	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Value	123,519	161,389	125,399	25,819	38,151	60,729	47,825

Source: Integral Program for the Promotion of the Book Industry published by the Ministry of Trade and Industrial Development, Nov., 1987.

Every year, universities publish texts for secondary schools and colleges. In the case of UNAM it is difficult to have a general idea of production since institutes, faculties and research centers are totally autonomous in this respect. UNAM's Office of Literature which has succeeded in maintaining a significant level of publications will reduce its production due to "the severe financial cutback," according to Marco Antonio Campos. Thus, of

publishing is "ideal" in times of uncontrolled inflation but "it has its drawbacks since some institutions—and I'm talking about large governmental bodies—take their time in paying or simply never pay. This is terrible because we always pay immediately." For this reason, he states, "we will continue to work with those who pay and we won't work with those who don't until they change."

of Libraries and Publications produces the textbooks required each semester. The National Institute of Fine Arts will publish between 30 and 40 new titles in 1988, most joint publishing efforts. The crisis has led to a proliferation of joint publications. However because of the government's austerity measures, there are institutions which have been unable to see their work through.

In general, the crisis in the publishing industry has led to a reduction in copies produced because of the lower demand. There are some publishers who do not even include information on the number of copies in their editions. At the beginning of the 1980s, the average number of copies was 5,000, now it is 3,000 even if they are works of average importance. Students, unable to buy textbooks, especially specialized ones, because of their high cost, are resorting to photocopies. José Emilio Pacheco, parodying Roland

Barthes, has said that we live “in the xerox degree of literature,” a degree in which, since only specific chapters are reproduced, our knowledge is so compartmentalized that the panoramic view of the subjects which books broach is lost. Added to this is the proverbial shortage of bookstores, acknowledged by both the Education and the of Trade and Industrial Development ministries. There are only 400 bookstores in the entire country, 100 less than in 1984 because of the crisis. There is only one

bookstore for every 200,000 inhabitants. And, according to the last survey undertaken by the Ministry of Trade and Industrial Development, 54.5 percent of all book sales occur in the Mexico City metropolitan area and another 12 percent in the metropolitan areas of Guadalajara and Monterrey. Reading, a basic civil right and an important democratic exercise, is becoming increasingly difficult. Knowledge is becoming increasingly privatized. □
