

Why the Review Voted to Leave Washington

by Richard C. Osborn

The General Conference appears to be a step closer to moving its headquarters out of the nation's capital into the suburbs. Consolidation of all three North American Adventist printing plants into a single, more cost-efficient operation appears to be dead for the foreseeable future. These are consequences of an action taken by the Review and Herald Publishing Association Constituency on October 16, 1980. The following tells the story of, and poses questions about, that action.

At their meeting last October, the Review constituency voted overwhelmingly to sell its Nashville plant (formerly operated as the Southern Publishing Association) and move all factory functions from the Washington, D.C., plant to a site one to one-and-a-half hours from Washington. At some time in the future, the editorial and marketing offices will also move to the new site, and the Washington, D.C. plant will be sold to pay for expansion and support of the new factory.

The constituency also voted to recom-

mend to the Review Board that a Hagerstown, Maryland, site recommended by a site location committee be seriously considered as the new location. According to committee estimates, this move will cost approximately \$5½ million more over a five-year period than combining all Review operations in the Washington plant. An additional \$1 million will be needed to purchase land.

A question of key importance in constituency deliberations was how best to effect the merger, already decided upon, of the Southern and Review and Herald Publishing Associations. As early as 1977, the General Conference ad hoc committees were studying the possibility of merger in order to save money. At the 1979 Annual Council the North American Division Committee on Administration (NADCA) voted that the number of publishing houses in North America be reduced to two, one on the West Coast and one in the East, saying that "it is highly desirable to have the plant for the East located in an area other than Washington, D.C., because of the large number of major church institutions and the resultant congregating of large numbers of Seventh-day Adventists in this area."

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Within a week after the 1979 Autumn Council Vote, General Conference leaders met with the Southern Publishing Association Board and appointed committees to study an institution which was fighting for its life.

On January 8, 1980, the Southern constituency heard from these committees detailed recommendations for saving the publishing house, including the recommendation of a 20 percent reduction in staff within three months. The constituency declined to approve merger with the Review, voting instead to request that the General Conference representatives "convey to the General Conference Committee the deep conviction of this body in regard to maintaining the Southern Publishing Association as an independent and self-standing institution." If, despite this appeal, the General Conference insisted on studying the possibility of a merger, the constituency would concur. But in the meantime, Southern's management should immediately implement the economies and other policies recommended to save the institution.

Less than two months later, on March 5, a General Conference subcommittee recommended merger of assets, liabilities and management under the name Review and Herald Publishing Association. Operations would continue at Nashville and Washington until a suitable new location for the merged institutions could be found. Within two weeks a meeting of the Southern constituency was convened in Nashville.

After long, passionate debates, the constituency reversed its January action and agreed on March 18 to merge. Southern's workers were *not* guaranteed that they would not have to move to Washington, D.C., and many had the impression that there was a commitment to move to a completely new site. The next day the Review constituency meeting in Washington agreed to the merger. The succeeding day, March 20, the Southern constituency was flown to Washington for a joint meeting of both constituencies, where the merger was officially approved. It was also voted to conduct a study into the feasibility of operating one plant in a new location.

The newly merged Review Board appointed a 14 member Feasibility Study Committee chaired by Lowell Bock, General Conference vice president, to study all the options. Under the commission of the committee, Alan A. Anderson, Jr., a retired federal government information systems scientist, and two Review departmental managers, Robert Ellis, Jr., and Russell Wetherell, prepared a detailed 81-page analysis of the options, utilizing modern survey techniques, computer studies of marketing centers, distribution, and membership, and studies of modern factory operations. The study also suggested proposals for addressing the broader issue of publishing practices in the church. Only the Review Board members, however, saw the complete study with the delegates to the October constituency receiving a brief, nine-page summary.

Neal Wilson reported to the October constituency meeting that the feasibility study committee had analyzed seven possible options. The Review Board recommended the option calling for a two-stage move out of Washington. In the first stage, all property in Nashville would be sold. Land would be purchased an hour to an hour-and-a-half driving time outside Washington, and buildings constructed to house all printing operations. In the second stage, at some unspecified time in the future, the editorial and marketing offices would be moved from their present quarters to the new location. Harold F. Otis, Jr., general manager of the Review, with the help of professionally prepared charts placed across the front of the church, explained that a number of variables had been studied, including concentration of Adventists living in the states east of the Mississippi, proximity of paper mills, access to a bulk mailing center, and the wishes of workers in Nashville and Washington.

In the subsequent discussion of the motion to move the Review, Robert Osborn, assistant treasurer of the General Conference in charge of investments, spoke first. Acknowledging that a General Conference treasurer did not lightly oppose the General Conference president in public, he nevertheless felt duty-bound, he said, to speak out against the

proposed move for two principal reasons.

First, the General Conference had loaned the Review \$5½ million at greatly reduced interest rates in recent years for long-term capital expenditures, \$4.2 million of which was still outstanding, although being paid off regularly. At the time the loans were made, assurances were given that the resultant expansion would enable the Review to function for many years. Furthermore, when the merger occurred, the General Conference was told that by running an extra shift the entire workload could be handled in the Washington plant.

Second, he reminded delegates that each Adventist institution in the Washington, D.C., area is dependent on the others. He predicted that if the Review moved, a domino effect would first hit the General Conference followed by Home Study Institute, the Takoma Park Church, and the John Nevins Andrews School. He asserted that if the Review facilities were turned over to the General Conference, it was questionable whether they could be leased or sold because of special zoning variances allowed by the District of Columbia government just for the Review. The most cost-effective use of church funds would be for the Review to combine into one operation in Washington.

Roy Branson, senior research scholar at the Kennedy Institute of Ethics in Washington, D.C., and a delegate from the Potomac Conference, presented a paper prepared by him and the other lay delegate from Potomac, Robert Coy, the assistant general counsel of the Veteran's Administration. The paper, which Neal Wilson agreed to distribute to the delegates, argued that the proposed move to a newly built plant did not best serve the fundamental mission of Adventist publishing — to print and distribute literature at the lowest possible price to the largest number of people, particularly non-Adventists. Assuming such a mission, Adventist publishing should be as cost-effective as possible. The feasibility study had not provided grounds for thinking the Review sales would grow to the point that dramatic expansion was needed. Even if sales increased marked-

ly, the Washington site could furnish the increased production. Unlike most commercially viable printers that run their presses on three shifts 20-24 hours a day, the Review operates only one shift a day. What is needed is increased productivity from present facilities and equipment, not larger grounds.

Since the General Conference's President's Executive Advisory Committee (PREXAD) voted that it had neither the funds nor the interest to purchase the Review's Washington property, and since, because of its prox-

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imity to the General Conference, it could not be sold, the feasibility study itself, argued Branson and Coy, shows that selling the Nashville plant and concentrating all printing in Washington is by far the most economical option. Over the five years projected by the feasibility study, even allowing for the costs of improving the present plant, concentrating printing in Washington would save \$5½ million more than the two-stage move out of the city, and some \$5 million more than any other option. If the church were indeed committed to producing literature as inexpensively as possible, to achieve the widest distribution possible, and if a final decision had to be made at this constituency meeting, logic would dictate that the constituency vote that the Review remain in Washington.

Rather than urging such a vote, however, Branson proposed that the denomination conduct a thorough study, with a specified reporting date, into the possibility — what some leaders had suggested at the time of the 1979 Autumn Council — of maintaining several editorial and marketing centers, but consolidating all three North American printing

plants into one. The moment for achieving true consolidation of printing (while preserving editorial diversity) was now, when not only Southern had been merged with the Review, but reports indicated non-Adventist interest in purchasing the Pacific Press. Many members of the constituency, Branson pointed out, were workers at the Nashville plant who had suffered great trauma from the merger decision, and who were faced now with expensive moves that would uproot their lives. But the goal their sacrifices were to achieve — producing less expensive literature — would not be realized unless the constituents asked the General Conference to

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devise plans for a thorough consolidation of printing plants in North America.

After lunch, several speakers took the opposite view and supported the building of a new plant outside Washington. Workers at the Nashville plant stressed that selling houses in Tennessee and purchasing them in the Washington metropolitan area would impose a heavy, virtually insupportable financial burden. Furthermore, as one worker said, they did not want to live in an urban environment, but where they and their children could raise gardens. Economically and otherwise, homes an hour away from Washington seemed more reasonable. The president of the Southwestern Union, Ben Leach, said that a commitment had been made at previous constituency meetings that the Southern Publishing Association would not simply disappear in Washington, but be moved with the Review to a new, third location. General Manager Otis and Glenn Beagles, treasurer of the Review, stressed the difficulty of working with the government

of the District of Columbia to gain zoning and other variances because of community opposition to a factory in a residential community. Otis spoke of the Review’s need for a new adhesive binding unit; this would take away current storage space and necessitate further building expansion.

While the dominant trend of the discussion in the afternoon was in favor of the proposed move out of Washington, some speakers expressed reservations. Robert Coy said that after carefully analyzing the figures in the feasibility study, it seemed clear to him that the proposed move was not the most cost-efficient one, and he knew laymen who, while loyal to the church, were becoming increasingly disenchanted with unwise decisions by the denomination’s leadership. Furthermore, Coy said, as an official in the executive branch of the federal government he could assure church leaders that moving the Review, and inevitably in its wake, the General Conference, out of Washington would dramatically weaken the church’s ability to influence the leadership of the nation. From the point of view of influence, two hours outside downtown Washington might as well be the Midwest.

The president of Potomac Conference, Ronald Wisbey, urged a postponement of a vote until a comprehensive study had determined the most cost-effective organization of Adventist publishing, and the ideal location of a printing press serving the entire country. Wherever that place proved to be, he would support the move. During the months necessary for such a study, Washington was the most economical place for locating operations of the Review.

Without question, the most persuasive speech of the day was Neal Wilson’s comprehensive response late in the afternoon to opponents of a two-stage move. He acknowledged that the Review was working only one shift, and that in its present location it could increase production by working large, web presses through three shifts. He also agreed that several denominational publishers, using a single printing plant, or even non-Adventist presses, would be the most

cost-effective method of producing Adventist literature.

But, many were concerned, he said, that not having our own press would endanger the freedom of Adventist publishing. As for having a single plant, it was his judgment that achieving such a consolidation was simply not feasible, given present attitudes. The leadership of the church could not put all its time into an attempt to consolidate all operations into one plant for North America. Other projects and policies also demanded attention.

As for the location of the merged Review, Wilson said that the existing Nashville and Washington plants, while theoretically surrounded with enough land for expansion, were badly located in built-up urban locations. The Washington plant, for example, was bordered by residential streets sometimes clogged by supply trucks. Neighbors became annoyed. While more might be done to enhance contact with the community, there would likely always be disagreements and disputes over requests for necessary adjustments of city regulations. Furthermore, urban plants were potentially vulnerable to union pressure and boycotts. The Review would have to move out of Washington eventually, anyway. Inflation meant that the sooner the move, the better.

Wilson recognized that the refusal of the General Conference to buy the Review building when operations move to a new site, and its simultaneous insistence that it not be sold until the General Conference sold its property meant that the Review would not be realizing any income from the use of the property or from its sale unless the General Conference moved. He noted the resulting conjectures, before and during the constituency meeting, that the General Conference must be planning to sell not only the Review building, but also the entire complex of office buildings it owns along Eastern Avenue. He said that it might happen, although the leadership of the church was not spending all its waking moments devising ways to accomplish it. In any case, commitments had been made when the high-rise "North Building" was erected that would make sale without community approval extremely difficult.

He did think that it might be better for the General Conference if it were located on one of two properties it already owns in the Maryland suburbs north of Washington. Even if the General Conference were to move to one of these locations, it could retain the important Washington, D.C., mailing address.

Branson in a final appeal argued that Wilson had not refuted any of the facts cited by those opposed to the two-stage move, and had in fact conceded the validity of much of their analysis. He warned that if the constituency voted for the motion to move, true consolidation of Adventist publishing in North America would be postponed and Adventist books would remain high-priced and limited in circulation. Before the final vote, several members of the General Conference leadership made strong speeches in favor of the recommendation made by the Review Board.

When the secret ballot was counted and announced as 305 in favor of the move and 114 against, spontaneous applause broke out. Wilson quickly stopped it. No one had won today, he said. It had been a very difficult decision. Had he been sitting where many others had been, he could well have articulated their arguments in favor of a different decision.

At the October 16 meeting the constituency also received the report of a site committee appointed by the Review Board. The membership of the committee had been kept secret to prevent Adventists from buying land around the favored site as a real estate investment. The committee reported on several sites, the most favorable being in Hagerstown, Maryland, a medium-sized town located 80 miles north from Washington. The delegates concluded their principal business by bypassing the offer of the Potomac Conference president to provide free of charge land two hours driving time from Washington next to Shenandoah Valley Academy in Virginia. Instead, they voted to recommend to the Review Board the Hagerstown site costing an estimated \$1 million.

In a later interview with SPECTRUM, General Manager Otis said that the Review's

Nashville property has been sold to a non-Adventist Bible record business and will be turned over to the purchaser on May 15, 1981. By the end of January 1981 all the editors in Nashville will have moved to Washington, followed by a carefully prepared phasing-out process of plant employees who will also move to Washington. Several are retiring rather than moving and others are taking employment in the Nashville area. A double shift will be run at the Review's Washington plant to handle the extra work load.

Otis further said that the Review has options on property in both Frederick and Hagerstown, Maryland. A site engineering company has been hired to make a recommendation on January 15, with final action by the Review Board expected in February. An informal vote taken among local Board members after a tour of both sites indicates a strong majority in favor of the Hagerstown property pending further professional analysis. A spring 1981 ground-breaking is anticipated with plant construction expected to take 12 to 15 months. Otis has no projection on when the Washington plant will be closed or when the editorial offices will be moved to the new site.

Three key questions arise in connection with the proposed move of the Review.

1) *Why is the option of consolidating all publishing in the North American Division into one plant with separate editorial boards not being seriously considered at the present time?* In the larger, undistributed feasibility study document, Alan Anderson, Jr., wrote, "It would be possible for one publishing plant, properly equipped and running two or more shifts per day, to most economically provide the printing needs of the North American Division" (p. 77). Otis told SPECTRUM that this option was rejected for four basic reasons:

First, the Adventist philosophy promulgated by Ellen White of avoiding centralization.

Second, paper suppliers divide at the Mississippi River, meaning that if a West Coast strike of paper mills occurs, as happened re-

cently, the East Coast plant could supply paper through its mills.

Third, the United States is founded on the principle of "competition in the market place." Otis feels the church receives better service by having two competitive publishing houses.

Fourth, a complete consolidation is politically unrealistic and would result in the loss

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of money for the Review because of time taken to study something that probably will not happen. Wilson, who knows the difficulty of consolidation efforts through such experiences as the recent attempt to unify the Southern and Southwestern unions, alluded to this argument in the constituency meeting.

2) *Is Takoma Park another Battle Creek?* The only argument used for moving the Review out of the Takoma Park area in the 1979 Annual Council action was the "large number of major church institutions and the resultant congregating of large numbers of Seventh-day Adventists in this area." What light do facts throw on this assertion? According to 1979 figures, the 13,108 members in the 35 churches within a 25-mile radius of Takoma Park (from Columbia, Maryland to Vienna, Virginia) comprise 0.39 percent of Adventism's worldwide membership and 2.2 percent of the North American Division membership. The Adventist work force in the entire Washington area amounts to 4.3 percent of the worldwide total. Excluding employees of Washington Adventist Hospital, many of whom do not belong to the church, Adventist workers in the Takoma Park area make up 1.2 percent of the worldwide total.

How do these figures compare to Battle Creek when Ellen White was concerned

about too many members being in one area? In 1902, close to 20 percent of the total work force of the church worked in Battle Creek. Not only did many workers reside in Battle Creek, but 40 percent of the entire church's membership lived in the northern area between Ohio and Nebraska.

In actual fact, moreover, when Ellen White addressed the centralization issue at the 1903 General Conference Session, she urged Adventists to "make centers in many places." Unlike Battle Creek in 1902, Takoma Park today represents one of many Adventist centers around the world.

3) *Does moving the Review out of an urban environment, along with a probable General Conference headquarters move, represent a retreat from a commitment to urban ministries?* The Washington area is an urban community in which Adventists can make a substantial impact on the broader non-Adventist community. Here the church has four strategically located hospitals, a college, a high school, several elementary schools, one of the country's best and largest correspondence schools, 35 churches, a large publishing operation, the church's world headquarters, and a powerful Adventist radio station. The church's impact here can be all the more significant because Washington is the nation's capital and the residence of many overseas diplomats. Moving to the Washington suburbs would result in a less identifiable Adventist presence than is possible with a Takoma Park-based headquarters. It could result in the same kind of

weak Adventist presence that exists in other major American cities such as Chicago, Boston, New York City and San Francisco.

The report prepared by Branson and Coy for the constituency meeting states the issue well:

The spectacle of Adventist institutions, domino-like, removing themselves from sharing the problems faced by the overwhelming majority of Americans who are city dwellers, would make a statement that would be sadly noted. Finally, what effect would such a move have on Adventists themselves and their sense of mission to the great metropolises where most Americans live . . . ?

These thoughts run counter to current efforts to implement Ellen White's counsel on working cities from country outposts, notably those of Metro Ministries in New York City under its director, Ted Wilson. Some persons, however, among them Gottfried Oosterwal, professor of mission at Andrews University, argue that conditions have so changed from when Ellen White wrote as to necessitate a reassessment of the most effective approach to urban areas.

Such questions as these remain, then, and seem no less important after the October 16 vote than they did before. All Seventh-day Adventists should consider the implications and the effects of the proposed move of the Review and Herald from its present Washington, D.C., location.