

Publishing Yes; Printing No—The Future of Pacific Press?

by George Colvin

A revolutionary action differentiating between publishing and printing was passed April 7 by the General Conference Committee following Spring Council. The General Conference decision was the denomination's first attempt to combine the editorial pluralism desired by Ellen and James White when they established the Pacific Press and the efficiencies in production made possible and necessary by modern printing technology. If the General Conference action is implemented, Pacific Press Publishing Association will become strictly a publisher: a group of editors and promoters without its own press. The General Conference Committee voted to recommend that the Pacific Press *not* buy new property right away, that the Pacific Press be maintained as a publishing but not a printing entity, and that the General Conference establish a task force empowered to undertake a major study of the entire structure of denominational printing and distribution in North America, and to make recommendations for changes.

Before the General Conference Committee voted, President Neal C. Wilson said that the two major web presses at the Review and Herald Publishing Association could handle several times the present volume of total church printing in North

America. Since the Pacific Press also has two web presses, none of the denomination's powerful presses are being operated cost-effectively. The Pacific Press has a debt of some \$8 million and an unsold inventory of \$12 million. The Review and Herald Publishing Association has a debt of \$12-\$18 million. Wilson said that not only printing but patterns of distribution must be examined. During 1982 in North America only 161 literature evangelists earned more than \$10,000 (assuming they received 30 percent sales commission and 10 percent living subsidies). Only eight literature evangelists earned \$20,000 or more in 1982—only 1.3 percent of the 1,412 full and part-time literature evangelists active during 1982 in North America. The vote of the committee was part of a motion approving the sale of the Pacific Press Publishing Association property in Mountain View, California.

In addition to launching a major study of publishing in North America, the General Conference action meant the Pacific Press would maintain editorial offices only to process manuscripts. Its costly web presses would be sold. Manuscripts edited and promoted by Pacific Press would be printed on the presses of the Review and Herald Publishing Association or at non-denominationally owned printing establishments near the editorial offices of Pacific Press.

Meanwhile, employees of Pacific Press met (with management approval), to discuss the General Conference plan to divorce publishing from printing functions. Employees feared the complete liquidation of the press after such an action: "Balancing the problems of the North American Division publishing on the back of Pacific Press," one employee said.

Some employees were upset at what they considered to be preferential treatment by the General Conference of the Review and Herald Publishing Association. They felt that officers appeared to be more concerned with the debt load of Pacific Press than with the larger debt at the Review and Herald. Also, the General Conference recently bypassed the Pacific Press, which has published all school texts printed by the denomination, and awarded the Review and Herald a contract to print a series of readers for the Adventist school system in North America.

The Pacific Press employees were not the only ones acting. On April 4 the *Pacific Union Recorder* reported in an extensive front-page article: "The Pacific Union executive committee and the Central California Conference constituency have voted unanimously to recommend to the General Conference that the relocation of the Pacific Press be at a site in Pacific Union territory."

When the Pacific Press constituency met April 10, employee interest was obviously high. A proposal to enlarge the constituency by 50 members, by giving votes to recent (five years) and retired employees was passed by a fairly wide majority. Not surprisingly, present and past employees constituted the majority of the constituency.

Lowell Bock, a General Conference vice president and chairman of the board of Pacific Press, presented to the constituency the decision made by the General Conference to reorganize the press as a publishing association, without a production capacity. He explained the refusal of the General Conference to authorize the press to do commercial work. Because the General Conference in late 1982 advanced about \$850,000 to the Bank of America to prevent foreclosure, Pacific Press was technically in receivership to the General Conference. It would be impossible for the General Con-

ference to absorb indefinitely the continuing losses of the Pacific Press.

The constituency, dominated by employees, responded by moving that the present buildings and property in Mountain View owned by the Pacific Press not be sold until a new site is selected at which to relocate Pacific Press as both a publisher and press. Debate on this rejection of the General Conference proposal continued all day. Ellen White's desire to maintain more than one editorial voice in the denomination was raised. The General Conference officers thought that their proposal would conform to her laudable goal of maintaining checks and balances among editorial influences in the church. Lawrence Maxwell, editor of *Signs of the Times*, pointed out that the General Conference was essentially asking many press employees to vote themselves out of a job. Paraphrasing a famous quotation, he raised the specter of recent denominational history: "Pacific Press has nothing to fear for the future except as it shall forget the way that Neal Wilson has led the affairs of Southern Publishing Association in the past."

Interestingly the press employees, intent on maintaining the organization in its present form, did not explicitly dwell on the prospect of 100 of the 260 employees at the Pacific Press losing their jobs. Neither did the General Conference representatives introduce the subject, perhaps because it had not been discussed at their Spring Council meeting.

In the end, the General Conference would not alter its stand against the Pacific Press becoming a printer of commercial work, and the employee-dominated constituency would not agree to Pacific Press becoming a publisher instead of a printer. The only vote passed by the constituency was to defer a final decision until another constituency meeting on June 12.