

THE PEOPLE'S PRINTER

A Report on the Government Printing Office

by

Shawn P. Kelly



Public Interest Research Group
P.O. Box 19312
Washington, D.C. 20036

Introduction

One day, as a junior high school student, I came across the Superintendent of Documents' monthly list of available government publications. I asked to be put on the mailing list and for years looked forward to checking off the pamphlets and reports that interested me. The prices were low and the service fairly prompt. Soon, the Post Office, which then symbolized promptness and reliability, was delivering the Congressional Record; I never ceased to marvel how the government printers could produce overnight and so accurately the massive record of that day's Congressional activity.

It was with this early experience as a consumer of the Government Printing Office (GPO) publications that I observed, in the late Sixties and early Seventies, the slide of the GPO's performance and the sharp rise of its prices. Librarians would write me complaining of GPO's terrible delays and snafus. Matters became so desperate that a counter-reaction set in and GPO is now more back on track in the servicing of its orders.

However, there is more to examine in the GPO's performance than its order response time. There is even more to herald about the GPO's potential. One suggestion in this report is for the Government Printing Office to serve

as the publisher of last resort for worthwhile manuscripts which, for economic reasons, could not find a publisher in the private sector. Still, government officials who review "The People's Printer" restrict their scrutiny largely to administrative and hardware issues. In addition, pricing practices are treated as inscrutable and handled with an air of resignation. Clearly, there needs to be a larger perspective.

If information flow is critical for an informed citizenry and improved democratic government, then the GPO is a critical artery. What is made available, at what price and with what distribution policy are important questions for the people to debate. What a Public Printer can envision with new technology and new ideas are matters for public assessment as well as internal GPO contemplation. Indeed, there will be little contemplation from within unless there is more awareness from without.

A lengthy series of policy questions were raised in the May 1979 Report* of the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee to the Congressional Joint Committee on Printing. Although the Committee did not attempt to answer these questions, the report does provide a useful, but limited, checklist of the kinds of decisions which Congress should consider in the forthcoming revision of the law governing the GPO.

* The Report is available free from the Joint Committee on Printing, U.S. Congress.

Unfortunately, discussion of new technology and new needs for GPO to meet happens to coincide with budget pruning time in government. Similarly, many local governments are reducing the budgets of public libraries which purchase GPO materials. And, pressures are increasing to cut back on the availability of government periodicals. The first to go are usually periodicals beamed to consumer and worker audiences, not those used by special economic interests.

Moreover, GPO's poor promotion of publications for general audiences leads to lessened support for such materials by the White House's Office of Management and Budget. This is only one instance that points to the necessity for GPO to view its publications as something more than inventory occupying shelf space. If the GPO understood better the significance of the content of these publications, it might have more interest in wise promotion strategies, thereby avoiding the mindless destruction of useful information. A classic compendium of materials on the automobile industry, prepared by the Senate Small Business Committee in 1968, did not sell quickly enough because virtually no one in the country knew about its availability. About three years later, GPO shredded 3000 copies, according to Committee staff

members. Shawn Kelly discovered in his research for this report that such a practice was not infrequent.

The GPO is one of Washington's most neglected institutions. The agency has acted in a boring fashion, and it has been viewed with boredom. This image has been its camouflage. The time is way past for a deeper examination of the behavior, role, and future of the Government Printing Office as it moves into its thirteenth decade. Shawn Kelly offers his observations as an interested citizen. He studied GPO's history, its relations with other government agencies, and interviewed numerous individuals about current conditions. We hope that this report, The People's Printer, will help focus the kind of attention on the Government Printing Office which will improve its services for all Americans.

Ralph Nader
July 1979

THE PEOPLE'S PRINTER

Shawn P. Kelly*

As more people complain that the federal government doesn't produce much for the public, one division of the government can be exempted: the Government Printing Office. Each year GPO offers over 25,000 different titles for sale. For the farmer there is the Agricultural Yearbook; for young parents GPO has its bestsellers "Infant Care," "Your Child from One to Six," and "Your Child from Six to Twelve." GPO sells publications ranging from the Congressional Record to "Adult Physical Fitness." GPO has something for anyone's interest, no matter how specialized or unusual.

One hundred twenty years ago Congress created the Government Printing Office with a simple purpose in mind: GPO was to be the single and central source of printing for the United States Government, and to be the solution to problems Congress had had with printing since the founding of the country.

Today, with an annual budget of \$626 million, the GPO is the heart of the government's printing operations and the largest printer in the world. No one knows

* Shawn Kelly is a graduate of Vanderbilt University.

precisely how vast the entire body of printing costs for the whole government is (one estimate puts the cost of "placing images on paper for Federal purposes" at between \$1.0 and \$1.72 billion.¹), but one thing is certain: nobody is in control.

Today, GPO struggles to hold its own against the demands of Congress and the Executive agencies, as well as against the increasingly insistent demands of an indignant public. Its problems are complex and widespread. At its best, GPO is doing only an adequate job; on many levels it is doing a completely inadequate job; on other levels it is doing nothing at all.

The Government Printing Office is actually two different organizations in one. GPO is first and foremost the Government's printing office. In this capacity it serves the needs of Congress, the Judiciary, the Executive departments, and the independent agencies. GPO should not be confused with a publisher; it only prints what the rest of the government--its customer--has written. In this service to the rest of the government, then, GPO is a production-oriented organization.

GPO's second function is performed by the Superintendent of Documents division. By distributing the pub-

lications that GPO prints, it is supposed to be a central source of government information to the public. Except for "riding" an original production order to obtain the copies it sells to the public and sends to libraries, this division of GPO is not at all a part of the production process; it is a mail-order house.

Reform of both parts of GPO is necessary, as the correction of the second area is largely dependent on, though by no means limited to, solving the problems of the first. Senator Claiborne Pell, former chairman and now vice-chairman of the Joint Committee on Printing, has invited recommendations for changing the Federal printing laws, so the time may be ripe for change.

The Government's Printer

Any discussion of Federal printing must begin with Title 44 of the U.S. Code, which established two principal entities: the Joint Committee on Printing of the Congress, and the Government Printing Office. GPO was intended to be the single source of government printing and the JCP was designed essentially as GPO's board of directors. The Printing Act of 1895, the original codification of

the present law, merely legislated the relationship between those two bodies--a relationship that had existed since GPO's creation in 1860. The history of their original purposes and growth shows how their current authority and inadequacies are rooted in 19th Century designs.

Almost all printing done by the national government in the early years of the country was Congressional. At first, Congress procured its printing in a completely haphazard manner; printing was bought as it was needed, with little forethought as to quantitative or qualitative standards and few safeguards protecting Congress from poor work. Because of the government's continually growing printing needs, there developed a few local printing firms who capitalized on this need.

To protect itself, Congress passed the Printing Act of 1819, establishing set rates that it would pay for printing. Paving the way for decades of private profiteering from government printing, printers made a windfall from these set rates, as technological advances allowed for tremendously reduced costs to the printers. Their profits were literally guaranteed by law.

Countering these developments, Congress turned next to a contract system for its printing. This system proved

to be no more satisfactory than the previous one, however. In GPO's official history of itself, 100 GPO Years, the problem is described vividly:

It can be seen that competition under the contract system was fierce. Bids were made, and if the contractor made more money, he would pocket it. If he lost, he said: "I unfortunately lost, and surely the Government does not want me to do work for them and lose money in the performance." The appeal was usually met with a response by Congress, with deficiencies made up with bonuses, sometimes up to \$200,000.(2)

In 1852, Congress created the Joint Committee on Printing, whose purpose was to establish guidelines for printers, and hired a Superintendent of the Public Printing who was supposed to guard against opportunistic printers. These two groups, though, were unable to arrest a system based on political patronage and unscrupulous business tactics.

The Government Printing Office was established in June 1860 as a result of this frustration. The debate was intense, and the arguments then raised against the growth of a huge bureaucracy have a peculiarly contemporary ring to them. Despite those objections, GPO was established--basically as a last resort. The facility was bought from a private printer and the plant opened the following March on the day of Lincoln's inauguration.

The GPO progressed rather well during its first years. still under the authority of the Joint Committee on Printing. Costs were significantly reduced by removing the source of the printing from private hands. Later, the law of 1895 was written in part to stop political influence within GPO, and to codify the monopoly on authority of JCP and the monopoly on production of GPO.

This brief history was meant to illustrate a point: GPO's original purpose was to serve the printing needs of Congress more effectively, economically, and honestly than had the private printers before it. But now, GPO serves the Executive branch far more than the Congress.

At first, the Executive branch voluntarily used GPO's services during the lengthy recesses of Congress; the Printing Act of 1895 made the use of GPO by the Executive and Judicial branches mandatory, and in 1895 that relationship made sense, as the Executive departments' needs were still well within GPO's capacity of idle press time. But that balance between Congressional and Executive work-loads is very different today. The ratio has been turned on its head, with most printing by far coming from the Executive branch. In appropriations hearings for the fiscal year 1979, Public Printer John J. Boyle stated that of the

total GPO budget, only seventeen percent will come from the Legislative branch. In dollars, the budget of GPO will be about \$626 million, of which \$108,637,000 is appropriated by Congress for its printing needs.³

Despite this turnaround, however, the Joint Committee on Printing is still the administrator and policymaker for the whole government's printing, and the services of GPO still operate under JCP's authority. The fact is that this Congressional committee, because of its structure, lack of staff, and remoteness from the primary source of printing, is unable to perform its job. Its failure is one of the main reasons for the breakdown of the Federal printing system.

The Joint Committee on Printing

Title 44 sums up the authority of the JCP quite succinctly. Section 103 states:

The Joint Committee on Printing may use any measures it considers necessary to remedy neglect, delay, duplication, or waste in the public printing and binding and the distribution of Government publications.

This clause is referred to as JCP's "remedial powers." In effect, JCP is a sort of separate agency with sweeping powers over all branches of government that any ambitious bureaucrat would envy.

JCP's powers appear to be great at first glance; within the language of "any measure it considers necessary" could be the makings of a powerful center of control. In fact, a virtual vacuum exists in a committee whose potential for strength, direction, and control has collapsed under the burden of a system it cannot master.

The JCP's weakness comes largely from the nature of its composition. Section 101 of Title 44 states:

The Joint Committee on Printing shall consist of the chairman and two members of the Committee on Rules and Administration of the Senate and the chairman and two members of the Committee on House Administration of the House of Representatives.

Even an inexperienced observer of Congress would expect that the members of this committee would approach their jobs with little enthusiasm. When Congressmen who either seek or are assigned membership on one committee find themselves grafted, ex-officio, to another body, one can predict the weakness of the committee from the beginning. Couple this with the fact that JCP is not a "legislative" committee, and you have the perfect environment for apathy.

The result is that the Congressmen on the committee all but ignore their duties. As staff director Denver Dickerson puts it, "This committee is a staff-oriented

committee." He goes on to say that there are only four official meetings of the committee each year. The term "staff-oriented" is somewhat of an understatement; the committee is nothing less than staff-directed. In fact, the staff is the committee.

Were the staff performing the JCP's duties to supervise the entire system of Federal printing, then the lack of attention by the Congressmen could be partially excused. But the staff, partly because of its small size, is itself incapable of doing the job it has been assigned. In a paper delivered at American University in 1960, Chester G. Hall, Jr. made what is still a largely accurate analysis of JCP's ineffectiveness. Hall writes:

Even a cursory review of the Annual Staff Reports to the Joint Committee indicates that the work which the staff reports it has accomplished in any one fiscal year is not within the capabilities of a fourteen member staff, only eight of whom are involved in the control of public printing.(4)

As Hall implies, the problem is not a question of personalities, but of size. While the scope of federal printing has grown tremendously since 1960, the JCP has not. Twenty years of staff changes have borne out Hall's analysis that the job is just too big for the staff to handle.

Because the job is too large to handle, staff members

directly involved in supervision of federal printing limit the scope of their work by necessity. According to Edwin R. Lannon, a Social Security official with lengthy experience in government printing and with GPO, the staff of JCP occupies itself mostly with "approving equipment requests that the money has already been appropriated for." Hall puts the case more completely:

The principal reason for the Joint Committee's lack of action in [regulating government printing more completely], however, has not been a lack of interest or a lack of recognition of its potential authority to step in and decide that...specific public printing constitutes waste or duplication or is not necessarily legal. Rather it is the magnitude of the job with relation to the capabilities of the Committee staff which has practically forced the Committee's lack of action.(5)

The degree to which the committee staff has limited itself was especially evident in an interview I had with staff director Dickerson. I asked whether the rise in prices for GPO's publications had had an effect on its circulation rates. Dickerson responded, "I don't know. You'll have to ask GPO about that." On the subject of the GPO pricing formula for its documents I received an even more candid answer: "They've [GPO officials] come in with their charts and have gone through their formulas, and I still don't understand how they do it. You could

call in any one of the other staff members and they wouldn't be able to tell you how the formula works either. Maybe GPO can explain the pricing formula to you. Maybe I'm just thick."

Typical of JCP's docility is the fact that, since its beginning in 1846, it had not held hearings until November 1978. In the early Seventies GPO was beset with complaints about rising prices and slow delivery. Public and Congressional criticism was at its most strident at this time. Dickerson comments, "We haven't had any need to hold hearings. I thought we would have to hold hearings over the distribution problems, but they've really improved in that area." His relief was apparent.

Other members of Congress are as much in the dark about JCP's activities as anyone else. Criticism, however, is usually muted. Atypical was an outburst by Congressman Laurence Coughlin of Pennsylvania during a recent appropriations hearing for JCP:

I have been on this subcommittee going on six years now, and we have been trying to get a handle on this thing, and have gotten the darndest runaround I have ever seen. We always get referred back to your committee.

If your committee is not in a position to do this, or oversee it or what have you, then we ought to get rid of it because we just seem to get nowhere.⁶

The frustration of many JCP critics couldn't be more clear.

JCP has as much as admitted that it cannot perform as it should. It requested and received a \$500,000 appropriation to hire a consulting firm (Coopers and Lybrand of Washington, D.C.) to study the problems of government printing. The JCP recently released the consulting firm's report entitled "Analysis and Evaluation of Selected Government Printing Office Operations." As it has done so many times before, the government has paid for this "shadow committee" to do the work the real committee should do and is paid to do. The public is given two bills for the same service.

Though there is little central control over all facets of Federal printing from JCP, the law requires that all work be done through GPO. As a result, GPO is as close to being in charge as anyone. It makes its policies to suit its needs, and as might be expected, its policies are far from impartial. Since non-Congressional work constitutes 83 percent of GPO's annual budget, one would expect GPO to give the Executive departments and independent agencies 83 percent of its press time and attention, or something close to that figure. Despite Congress' seventeen percent share of GPO's budget, GPO's primary service is to Congress. It is little wonder that agency and department officials are the most bitter critics of GPO today.

The reasons for GPO's preferential treatment of Congress are no mystery. GPO is technically and historically an extension of Congress, under the supervision of JCP. (Even until World War II most of the printing of the government was Congressional). As a result, the machinery--the actual printing presses--is specifically designed to serve Congress' needs. Congress' requirements are unusual because they depend upon great speed. The printing of the Congressional Record, the largest single task performed by GPO, is a tremendously difficult job. Each night, starting around 5:00 or 6:00, the proofread texts arrive from the Hill, and the process of layout, typesetting, and printing begin. The previous day's Record must be on each Congressman's desk by 9:00 in the morning; the rules of Congress require that the Record be distributed before any further legislative action can be taken.

The division of GPO that conducts Congressional printing has the atmosphere of a war room. At any time of the night the central office knows what stage the printing has reached. Planning is done to the minute, and a slow-up in any section is immediately noticed. In the morning, several waves of carriers are sent to the Hill depending upon which committee has the earliest hearing.

GPO officials are quite naturally proud of their service to Congress. "There are some things that GPO does better than anyone else," says Public Printer John J. Boyle. The necessity of a printing press under the control of Congress cannot be doubted; no private printer in the country could operate at the beck and call of Congress the way GPO can. The head of the Congressional desk, Scott Sonntag says, "This is what it's all about."

GPO officials know that a Congressman will not cause trouble as long as he is well-served. They also know that if angered he can make life quite unpleasant for them, as Congress is the only body with the power to drag GPO officials before it to testify. The departments and agencies can complain to JCP or Congressmen, but of all GPO's customers, only Congress can coerce GPO effectively. As a consequence, GPO makes sure that Congress, if no one else, is happy.

Outside this fraternal collaboration between GPO and Congress, however, is the rest of the Federal government. Part of the Executive branch's work is done at the GPO plant to fill in the "valleys" when Congress' requirements drop. This is, however, only a small part of the Executive branch's work, perhaps as little as fifteen to twenty per-

cent. Those jobs that are done in-house are put on the back burner. Although GPO higher-ups deny it, a Congressional job of any magnitude will take precedence over an Executive publication without any additional pressure from the department or agency. (This is confirmed by composition workers who speak more frankly than their bosses.)

Only a small percentage of the Executive branch's work is done at the GPO plant, with the rest contracted out to private printers. Today about 62 percent of all work done by GPO is actually procured from private printers, and almost all of that is non-Congressional work. Nonetheless, GPO is still in charge of the procurement by law. Before a discussion of the pitfalls of farming-out work, the specific problems of GPO's role in this practice should be examined.

The main difficulty is obvious. There is a distance between the producers of the publications and the printer. As a result, agency officials are never quite sure what the status of a job is; they have only an indirect communication with the printer through GPO. On one occasion I sat in the office of an Executive department printing officer while he tried to locate a shipment that should have already arrived. He was unable to locate it. The

simple solution--calling the printer--was blocked by GPO, the middleman in the deal.

A more intangible detriment of this system involves timeliness. Department officials must place their printing orders far in advance if they hope to get a publication on time, and very often the work is still late. Although private printers are committed to a specific delivery date in their contracts, penalties are usually minor. Users of government statistics need information rapidly; old data are worthless. Whether GPO does all it can to force printers to deliver is debatable. Executive department and agency printers would feel more comfortable if they were in control.

If a department or agency must have a publication printed faster than the usual twelve to fourteen week period, GPO can arrange to have it done. But the department must pay a 30-50 percent surcharge for the extra speed. Private printers know they have the government over a barrel, and the surcharges often appear to be nothing less than a legal form of extortion, supported by the government's need for rapid information.

Executive departments, then, do not have the influence with GPO that Congress has--not only because of their lack of legal authority, but because the printing is actually

being done by a third party on whom the blame for problems and delays can be placed. Executive officials are reluctant to accuse GPO of dragging its feet (perhaps since stirring up trouble might bring about that very result), but almost all of them agree that they would like to have the option of choosing their own printers. While limited experiments in direct dealings with printers and the departments have been allowed by the JCP on occasion, there is little indication that such a practice will be approved on a large scale: GPO is unwilling to give up its control.

What is the result of this red tape placed on the Executive departments? Henry Lowenstern, editor of the Labor Department's Monthly Labor Review and one of GPO's most outspoken critics, states the case bluntly: "When a law gets so out of date, the only logical response is to ignore it." All agencies and departments have printing presses of their own, but they are only supposed to be used under unusual circumstances and then limited to JCP quotas and guidelines. Instead, the agencies often use their own presses or sometimes privately contract out to save time. Because this activity is illegal, no one will talk in specific terms about how much goes on, but it is common knowledge that such evasions are frequent.

GPO officials also know that this happens, as does the Joint Committee on Printing. The General Accounting Office report of December 29, 1975 made this common knowledge official. Yet the same problems continue today as did three years ago; JCP lacks the ability to monitor and control what it has mandated. Although it is probably far more expensive to do the printing on a piecemeal basis at many different agency plants or through procurement officials duplicated throughout the departments, GPO shares no part of this added financial burden, so it has little incentive to change; the costs are buried in padded department and agency budgets.

Farming-out

It is appropriate to question the wisdom of the government's use of commercial printing. Although the critics of GPO envision a system in which they would have more control over their printing programs than they do today, they fail to question whether the government should be dependent upon the manipulations of profit-motivated firms. This policy deserves close scrutiny.

GPO was created to do away with the high costs and uncertainties of commercial printers. As even GPO's official history notes, the creation of a government print-

ing press originally resulted in tremendous savings to the taxpayers. The wisdom of this arrangement has been gradually forgotten in the last thirty years, as now the majority of the printing is done by commercial firms. Why has GPO returned to the use of private printers?

GPO officials have many explanations for doing most of their work outside, all of which should be examined. First, GPO is not equipped to do the special kinds of work that the agencies need. GPO's machinery is particularly designed to do Congressional work, and specifically geared to provide overnight service on a daily basis, but this is an evasion, not a reason. We know that GPO is not equipped to do a different quantity or quality of printing, but the real question is why hasn't it equipped itself to do more sophisticated printing work? Although GPO officials mention the waste of a huge overhead, they do not provide any detailed cost-benefit analyses to show exactly how much overhead is too much. They have thus succeeded in limiting the boundaries of their responsibility.

GPO officers next explain that because bids are offered to a wide range of firms, at least one firm is picked up who bids "at just about cost," according to Boyle, in

order to keep its presses running during a slack period. At first this is a convincing argument. It is true that printers avoid having idle presses. If, indeed, GPO were able to snare only or mostly those printers who would print at about cost, then the private printers' lean overhead probably would make their prices lower than GPO's.

This argument, however, bears little resemblance to what actually occurs. GPO does maintain a list of 6,000 commercial firms, but according to Charles M. Scott, GPO's commercial procurement chief, only about 2,000 are ever awarded bids. The bids are divided into three groups: under \$250, in which perhaps only one bid is solicited; between \$250 and \$5,000, in which case three or four firms are called over the phone for bids; and over \$5,000 value, for which about twenty bids are formally taken and out of which usually only six or seven respond. Companies that have done government work in the past are returned to the front of the bid list, getting preferential treatment over other firms.

As the originally broad survey of commercial firms is considerably narrowed by this process, the result is that many companies specialize in government work. According to Scott, the number one and two government printing contractors both specialize in government jobs, principally

forms. Braceland Brothers, a Philadelphia firm and the number one contractor of government printing, did \$6,373,657 worth of work between October 1977 and March 1978; the yearly total would presumably be close to \$13 million in government jobs. Since the average job is about \$1,200, Braceland Brothers is doing quite a bit of work for the taxpayers.

Braceland Brothers is not alone in making a sales empire from government printing. Based on GPO's own half-year totals (Appendix A), 47 different firms throughout the country each will perform over \$1 million worth of government printing in this fiscal year. These 47 firms get over 50 percent of the value of all work that is farmed-out. Even more startling is that the top 30 firms carry out over 44 percent of the total. And yet GPO officials claim these companies are desperate to fill idle press time and are taking work at just about cost! No one disputes that these firms are the low bidders of the private sector, but it is clear that a profitable industry has been created by the government's desire to let somebody else do the work for it.

There have been no careful analyses of the costs of commercial printing compared to doing the work in-house. GPO claims that it can never underbid the lowest commercial

printers, and even Executive printers believe that GPO's prices are and will always be higher than commercial firms. The auditors at the General Accounting Office seem satisfied with GPO's claims that its high overhead keeps costs up. John Leitch, a GAO auditor, says that if commercial firms are not cheaper they are "certainly not more expensive than GPO."

But several factors are absent from the equation: none of the estimates considers the costs of GPO's bidding process itself. Personnel and computer costs incurred in this division are not accounted for. Surcharges that agencies pay for quick delivery also go unaccounted. Savings that could result from making better use of agency in-house machinery have not been estimated, and the intangible value of timeliness is ignored in present analyses.

None of these costs has been taken into account because the policy that private printers will do the work has been determined without considering the overall efficiency of the system. JCP staff director Dickerson says simply, "The Federal Printing Procurement Program was designed to spread work throughout the country and to stimulate the private sector." In fact, he sounds almost willing to abolish GPO when he states, "This is the only area I can think of in which government is producing

something that it can get in the private sector. We don't have a government chair factory, for instance." Supporting this policy is Executive Order A-76 which also requires maximum use of the private sector.

Commercial printing is convenient, then, to almost every special interest surrounding GPO. Congress is satisfied because it can still have fast service from the government plant no matter what happens to the agencies. Congress can also avoid having to appropriate any more money directly to GPO to expand its capacity, and can let the costs grow invisibly through individual agency and department budgets. The present policy is certainly convenient to GPO in that it can control all government printing while actually performing only the jobs that it selects. GPO need not attempt to reduce its costs, since it is expected to be higher than some commercial firms. In many ways, the agencies and Executive departments also like commercial printing when the option is having GPO do the work itself; their only change would be to give themselves the option of deciding when and where the printing would be done.

Commercial printing is convenient to almost everyone. Everyone, it seems, except the taxpayer and consumer.

Reorganization

There are many who advocated the reorganization of GPO today, almost all of whom call for the transfer of authority and management of Executive branch printing to the departments and agencies themselves. It is not my purpose to suggest the particular organization of a future GPO plant; it is the government's job to spend the taxpayers' money in the most efficient way. However, the evidence suggests a few obvious ideas:

1. The needs of Congress and the Executive branch are significantly and fundamentally different, and the present service is inequitable. The rigid control of Executive printing by Congress must end. Congress is not equipped to supervise or manage the remote and vast printing needs of the rest of the government in such detail. It may well be that separate printing authorities for each branch will be necessary from a practical standpoint.

2. Printing policy and authority for each branch of government should be centralized. Although many Executive printing officers, such as Henry Lowenstern, advocate agency control and independence, the waste and duplication of machinery and personnel that would come

from decentralization cannot be ignored. Economies of scale must be preserved.*

3. The arbitrary policy of maximum commercial procurement should be abandoned. The entire system should be designed to provide the most cost-efficient production of government documents. The taxpayers can be spared the expensive results of a policy that benefits few at the expense of many.

Although the Joint Committee is considering revisions in Title 44, it is clear that Congress will be reluctant to change a system which is presently advantageous to itself. While the Executive branch has an ample number of advocates for itself, citizens and institutions on the outside must recognize the need for reorganization before any substantial improvement can be made in GPO's service to the public.

* An example of the chaos that could result from a decentralization is HEW's printing division. For two years (1976-78) HEW had no printing officer, though one is required by law. As a result, according to one member of the printing staff who wished not to be named, there was vast duplication of publication content. Everyone acts on his own authority. The waste of taxpayers' money could be enormous. Only an Executive body designed to control and co-ordinate all production of publications can be expected to work.

GPO's Service to the Public

Although the government's printing system requires an immediate reorganization, ultimately no amount of organizational restructuring will change the prevailing policies of the government in its service to the public. Although GPO produces more publications than anyone else in the world, the organization is grossly underpublicized. The lack of access to government publications deprives the taxpayers of the fruits of their taxes. And GPO's low profile is not entirely accidental.

Taking a step backwards, let us examine GPO's position in relation to the rest of the government. Congress and all the agencies publish reports, hearings, and journals. Much printing, such as Social Security or Welfare publications, is required by law; other publications are the products of government projects, hearings, and task forces. The customer---the agency, department, or Congress--pays for all composition costs such as design, writing, and layout. This product is given to GPO which, from one source or another, has the printing done. The customer pays GPO for the number of copies it has ordered.

The division of GPO in charge of public distribution

is the Deputy Public Printer known as the Superintendent of Documents (SupDocs). If the department makes the document public, SupDocs is allowed additional copies for distribution to depository libraries. If SupDocs wishes to sell the publication to the public, it may, with the agency's permission, "ride" an order for the additional copies that it wants. The number of additional copies, usually around 3,000, is determined by SupDocs in consultation with the publishing agency. SupDocs then sets the price for the sale of that document, and offers it to the public. The agency or Congressman may give away his own copies but may neither advertise any source other than SupDocs nor sell the publication if SupDocs is also selling it. The sales revenues are retained by GPO.

As a consequence of this arrangement many, if not most publications are distributed free to those consumers who know where to get them. The person who goes through the regular channels and orders from SupDocs may pay several dollars for a pamphlet or report that he could have received free directly from the source. A HEW official estimated that as many as 85 percent of the agency's publications are sent out free, either because SupDocs was not authorized to sell it, or from individual

requests. Other agencies estimate that very few of their publications are sent out free because of their large subscription base. Nonetheless, the system is so loose that no one knows exactly how many are given away.

Therefore, in discussing GPO's service to the public, we must first acknowledge that it is not the central source of government documents for the public that it is supposed to be. GPO officials cannot claim to be in control of such a vastly unorganized system. Any reform of the service to the public must look beyond how well or how poorly SupDocs performs what it does; it must recognize that there is much that GPO should be doing that it is not doing at all.

As stated time and time again by GPO officials in hearings before Congress, there are four programs administered by the Superintendent of Documents division:

1. The sale of Government publications produced by or through the Government Printing Office;
2. The distribution of Government publications to designated depository libraries;
3. The compilation of catalogs and indexes of Government publications, and
4. The mailing of certain Government publications for Members of Congress and other Government agencies, either in accordance with specific provisions of law or on a reimbursable basis. (7)

These four points are only a digest of the law's requirements. Point 4 refers to the distribution of those free documents already mentioned. Point 1 encompasses the

entire sales of publications to the public, the primary and regular channel for the distribution of most publications. Numbers 2 and 3 are part of GPO's service to depository libraries. Let us examine that service first.

A library is designated as a depository library either by specific mention in Title 44 (such as land grant universities and military academies) or through designation by Senators or Representatives in their districts. These libraries are entitled to free copies of all GPO publications, and must keep them for five years.

This program, while a fine idea, can hardly claim to be a sufficient source of government publications for the public. First of all, the limitations of libraries keep the public from having immediate access to information. The primary use of this system is for librarians and scholars; most workers do not have the time to spend hours doing library research. A further limitation to this program is that most libraries are not even included in the system and must, therefore, buy their publications like everyone else.* Their small budgets allow them to buy only the most essential publications. Obviously,

* According to the American Library Association, approximately 1,200 libraries out of the national total of over 100,000 are included in the depository system.

the depository library has shortcomings as a source of public documents.

The Sales Program fills this gap. Through it, individuals can purchase their own copies. There are two divisions of the Sales Program: the General Sales Program and the Special Sales Program. The Special Sales Program handles a small number of specific publications such as the Congressional Record, the Federal Register, the Code of Federal Regulations, and the U.S. Constitution. These publications are supported in part by appropriations aimed at keeping prices at a specific level (the Congressional Record, which now sells yearly for \$75, would cost several hundred were it not supported by appropriations). The Special Sales Program is required to be self-supporting.

The General Sales Program is the largest portion of the SupDocs division. An excellent starting point for a discussion of GPO General Sales is the March 22, 1975 article in Nation magazine by Frank Warner in which he outlined three major problems with GPO: prices had risen unnaturally quickly, GPO's delivery of publications took months on end, and GPO routinely destroyed surplus publications without trying to put them to any further use.

The image of GPO for some people still comes from

horror stories of its performance in the early 1970's. Prices had jumped 75 percent in one year, and delivery of publications could take six to eight months. Often, customers would receive a cancelled check without receiving the publications that were ordered. Even the usually uncritical Congressmen were making noise because of complaints by their constituents.

In the early 70's the mail order division of GPO was barely mechanized at all. Housed in an inadequate facility with a backward system of organization, and staffed by apathetic employees and supervisors, SupDocs was in a shambles. It is fair to say that it had probably been resting on past laurels, as GPO had always been praised for its efficiency. As a consequence of its slackness, from the highest manager to the lowest employee there was almost no dedication to efficiency. The system was simply collapsing.

Since that time, however, GPO has largely solved its difficulties in processing orders. By implementing many suggestions of the General Accounting Office, and by mechanizing the system with appropriate modern facilities, GPO has, according to a 1977 GAO report, "...reduced order-processing time from several months to 14 days"⁸

Since then, GPO claims it can process orders in an average of ten working days. GPO's delivery of publications is not an issue today.

The prices and pricing of publications are more complex and less satisfactory aspects of GPO's performance in the last three years. At the time of Warner's article, the sky-rocketing prices of GPO were perhaps the single most visible issue, and the public and library groups complained that the prices were prohibitively high. The shock was greatest because GPO's hallmark had always been its low prices.

Even at a time when inflation was raising the cost of living so quickly, GPO's prices were racing far out ahead at the rate of several hundred percent for some publications. But the rapid rise in GPO's prices is really no mystery. For the most part, GPO was passing on a series of price rises that it had faced itself.

In fiscal year 1971, the newly created Postal Service raised GPO's bill from a little less than \$2 million to about \$15 million in fiscal 1972--an increase of over 700 percent! ⁹ Most experts, including General Accounting Office accountant John Leitch, agree that GPO had "...not been paying its fair share of postage." (Edwin R. Lannon suggests that GPO had been actually cheating on its postage

so it could return more money to the Treasury). Even so, GPO was forced to accomodate a single increase of an overwhelming magnitude overnight which the Postal Service was allowing the rest of the nation's publishers and printers to phase in over a ten-year period.

At the same time, prices of paper hit the ceiling. By GPO's records, between February 1972 and February 1974, the prices of some kinds of paper went up by as much as 161 percent. The peak in 1974 came when prices were as much as 235 percent higher for some kinds of paper than the 1972 base price (Appendix B).

One might expect GPO to be in a position to force paper companies to lower their prices, but that is not a realistic expectation. Far from being a huge consumer of paper, the world's largest printer consumes something less than one half of one percent of the industry's refined paper. (The General Services Administration buys that much for government use outside Washington.) GPO's paper bids are also taken quarterly, and there are many different categories of paper that are bid for. Because its relatively small total is split up by so many competitive bids, GPO is not by any means in a forceful position to lower the prices of such huge paper companies as International Paper.

The question of price fixing in the paper industry is beyond speculation; it is established fact. In a front page story in the May 4, 1978 Wall Street Journal, Timothy D. Schellhardt writes, "The paper industry is acquiring a reputation as the nation's biggest price-fixer." Although there have been convictions in areas such as paper for packaging and containers, including a successful suit in Philadelphia against thirteen major companies, currently on appeal, no case has been resolved in the area of re-fined paper which GPO uses. With so many customers up in arms, there is little doubt, if the charges are true, that GPO's prices have been affected as well.

With all these simultaneous cost increases in the early 70's, GPO panicked and raised its prices by 73 percent across the board, and later at a rate of almost twenty percent annually. It was determined later* that many of the prices were far out of line with the costs of producing the publications, yet GPO officials claimed that the overall price rises were reasonable. "Infant

* Report to the Joint Committee on Printing. "Pricing of Publications Sold to the Public." GPO by the Comptroller General of the U.S. November 19, 1974.

Care," GPO's all-time bestseller, rose, in 1972, from twenty cents to one dollar---a 500 percent increase.

Like the issue of distribution, GPO's prices stir little controversy today. Prices have leveled off a bit; "Infant Care" still sells for \$1.00. Ms. Mary Lou Knobbe, former chairman of the Government Information Services Committee of the Washington Council of Governments, and a once vocal critic of GPO says, "They've made tremendous improvement...on a scale of 1-10, I would say about 7." Superintendent of Documents Carl LaBarre says he receives almost no complaints about GPO's prices. Indeed, he claims that all complaints have dropped to less than four percent of a random sample of mail, and one month's rate was less than two percent. To many critics, it would appear that GPO has largely satisfied the complaints about the problems raised in Warner's article.

There is far more room for criticism, however, than the complaint rate would lend one to believe. The lack of complaints can, perhaps, be attributed to a relief that GPO has returned to a period of 'normalcy' compared to its abysmally poor performance of the early 70's. The public's relief is merely the calm that has followed a storm of problems. While GPO has improved over the

past several years, serious deficiencies in its performance still remain.

To return to the question of GPO's prices, there are really two sides to the issue: the actual prices that are charged and the method of determining those prices. GPO's price raises in the early 70's were said to be a response to their own increased production costs. But the second question---GPO's price formula---is an area in which the answers are not as easy to accept.

Title 44 for years made only this mention of pricing of publications:

The price at which additional copies of Government publications are offered for sale to the public by the Superintendent of Documents shall be based on the cost as determined by the Public Printer plus 50 percent.

What does the law mean by "cost"? More than any other section of Title 44, this term has been the subject of differing interpretations. From the consumer's point of view, it is also this section of the law that needs the most alteration.

It seems clear that the original intent of the law was that "cost" should refer only to the actual printing and binding costs of the additional copies that were being

bought. While this specific language was changed in the early 1900's from "printing and binding" costs to costs "as determined by the Public Printer," there is every reason to believe that Congress intended no change in the actual meaning of what the costs were to include. The 50 percent additional charge was originally much lower, and was intended to cover most of the expenses. It was raised in the early 1900's to 50 percent because Congress believed that it could make more money by doing so.

Through the years, however, more and more factors were incorporated into the formula of the "cost," and the prices increased accordingly. Personnel costs, warehouse costs, handling charges, and postage are all included in the price of publications today. In addition, according to Social Security official Edwin R. Lannon, GPO bases its prices on "what it would cost under the worst set of circumstances," such as reprinting.

The history of these changes in interpretation of costs has been well-recorded by LeRoy C. Schwarzkopf of the University of Maryland Library. He makes it clear that by incorporating the expenses of the whole Superintendent of Documents operation into the formula for determining the publications' prices, the law has been consistently misinterpreted. In recent years, GPO of-

officials have consistently stated that their policy is for the costs of the Sales Program to be recovered by the sales of documents to the public, and Congress has come to expect just that. The fact that this was contrary to the intent of the law bothered few in Congress or at the GPO. The weight of precedent and reduction of Congressional expenditures was more important to the government than the law's intent. ¹⁰

Congress used to appropriate the funds necessary to cover the expenses of the General Sales Program, the revenues to be returned to the Treasury as miscellaneous receipts. In 1977, however, Congress removed this circumnavigation, and placed the General Sales Program on its own, stating specifically that all costs--administrative, printing, or others--would have to be recovered through sales receipts. Arguments over legislative interpretation have been stopped; Congress has made the law painfully clear. Consequently, Congress is able to divorce itself from even glancing at the management of the General Sales Program. Congress is free to worry only about reducing the costs of the publications it produces. No matter how high the prices of all other publications climb, Congress can let GPO blame inflation, and the costs are passed on to the consumers.

Henry Lowenstern, Monthly Labor Review editor, sums up the primary complaint of Executive department editors when he says "The publishing agency has no control over the decisions of the printer." He believes that the most popular publications are priced high in order to pay for the losses of less-popular ones; the differences in prices cannot be due to the small incremental paper and ink costs or to the similar warehouse and distribution costs for all publications. As Lowenstern goes on to say, "I think the price of a publication should reflect the printing costs and distribution costs of that publication."

Because the high prices of popular publications may force some people to drop their subscriptions, Lowenstern contends that achievement is punished. His solution would be to let the marketplace decide the success or failure of a publication rather than keeping it unnaturally afloat. While such a policy might be good for the popular publications, it is certainly not in the public interest to force the government to stop selling information simply because not enough people want it. The Agriculture Department cannot be brought to a standstill because the Labor Department refuses to share the fruits of its success. And yet, it is equally unfair to penalize and

reduce the number of readers of Labor Department journals in order to make up for another department's failure to appeal to the public. As long as SupDocs is required to be self-sufficient, this dog-eat-dog competition will continue to the public's ultimate disadvantage. The assumptions of the program must be changed.

Ultimately, GPO has no interest in the particular level of readership of any particular document, as long as the total revenues are enough to sustain the General Sales Program. Having put no effort into the writing or design of a publication, SupDocs has no intellectual stake in its particular success or failure. The publications GPO produces are merely objects of sale, rather than what they should be considered: vital information that could expand societal knowledge and civic awareness.

This is exactly the cavalier attitude that GPO demonstrates in its continued destruction of publications that fall below the top of its sales lists. Because GPO is neutral towards all its products, it is quite content to let their prices escalate beyond the range of some consumers, and then to destroy the excess copies that result from those same high prices.

More than four years have passed since the Warner

article exposed the Government Printing Office's practice of routinely destroying millions of publications each year. Despite this criticism, however, the same policy continues today; in fiscal year 1977, GPO sold as scrap paper about eight million copies of documents worth about nine million dollars. These figures are far in excess of what Warner estimated, yet GPO officials show less shame than ever about this shameful practice. Incredible as it may seem, one of those publications in 1978 was the "Report of the Watergate Special Prosecution Force" of which over one thousand copies were destroyed. It is clear that to its officials, the Government Printing Office is not considered primarily a source of valuable information, but rather a self-sustaining mail-order business.

The process by which certain publications are singled out for elimination is a model of bureaucratic insensitivity and mindlessness.

Granted, in many cases the agency or department of issue will declare the publication either superseded by a more current document, or obsolete because of out-dated information. Removal of these documents is clearly justified, as the public could be seriously misled if GPO's

documents are not current. According to Carl LaBarre, "90 percent of all the publications we destroy are obsolete." While it is impossible to determine the exact percentage of superseded or obsolete publications out of the entire number destroyed, it is clear from GPO files that it is by no means 90 percent, or even a majority. On nearly all destruction orders a standard sentence states, "Because this publication has been superseded, is obsolete, outdated, or of limited general interest, recommend disposal as scrap paper." However, when a publication has been superseded, additional notation is made. For example, "Relationships of Oil Companies and Foreign Governments," of which 958 copies were destroyed, had a specific footnote indicating that it had been "superseded by Revised Edition s/n-061-000-000z-0." Very few publications have such notation, however, suggesting that GPO destroys most publications because of "limited general interest."

Most destructions, then, are decided by GPO. If sales in the past year have been poor, or if the stocks of the publications are low, GPO usually decides that the documents should be sold as scrap. First the publication is offered back to the agency of issue; if it doesn't want the extra copies, GPO then has a free hand to dispose

of them as it wishes. Since agencies frequently don't have the facilities for storing the extra documents, it is not surprising that they seldom accept GPO's offer.

At this point, if there are either more than 500 copies, or \$300 worth of the publication, the decision is made by a review panel consisting of higher officials in the Documents division; if less than those amounts, the publications are destroyed without further consideration. This review system supposedly insures that publications that could be sold at a discount are saved from destruction, but this again is the rare exception.

From a sample section of the Documents division (each section corresponds to the department or agency it works with) only 47 destruction orders out of a total of 224, or about 21 percent, were actually evaluated by the review panel. Other sections show similar percentages. This means, of course, that as many as 80 percent of the different titles are destroyed without ever having a chance for re-sale. This system means that publications which sell well (i.e. they have fewer than 500 copies or less than \$300 worth on the shelves) are never offered again to the public, and only those publications that were unpopular originally are considered for a second chance.

Among the publications which never made it to the review panel for one reason or another are "Women and Poverty," "Rape and Its Victims," and "Wilderness Ecology." None of the destruction sheets for these publications indicates that the agency had recalled the publications, so one may infer that GPO decided they were of "limited general interest." This must come as a surprise to commercial publishers who have had one bestseller after another on many similar topics. One must ask whose "general interest" this refers to: GPO's or the public's?

While insensitive decisions such as these can be expected at the lower levels of the bureaucracy, even more amazing are the decisions made in the review process.

"Oregon's Bottle Bill: The First Six Months," had sold 4,800 copies between January 1973 and May 1978; the remaining 4,118 copies were destroyed. Similarly, "Toward Cleaner Water" had sold 6,481 copies between January of 1974 and May 1978; GPO destroyed the other 5,250 copies. Even the historic "Report of the Watergate Special Prosecution Force" had been reviewed. GPO officials decided that it wouldn't sell.

Each of these publications, though having sold fairly well over all, sold no copies in the final year. From

this, GPO felt they were of "limited general interest," but it is GPO's own advertising practices that create this drop in demand. A publication is listed in the catalogs when it first comes out, and also at the end of the year, but rarely ever again. It is no surprise that people do not buy these publications years after GPO has quit mentioning the fact that it sells them. GPO has rigged the game in advance.

Below are further examples of GPO's wanton destruction of valuable documents:

- "Future Structure of the Uranium Enrichment Industry"
- "Army Surveillance of Civilians"
- "World Food Conference"
- "A Guide to Federal Programs of Possible Assistance to the Solar Energy Community"
- "Final Report of the Senate Committee on Intelligence Activities and Rights of Americans"
- "The Investigation of the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy: Performance of the Intelligence Agencies"
- "Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders"

And these are just a few of the thousands destroyed each year.

At the time of Warner's article, GPO officials defended their destruction policies by claiming that the law prohibits them from offering a discount to the public. They interpreted a section of the U.S. Code which states

"A discount not to exceed 25 percent may be allowed to book dealers and quantity purchasers" to mean that no discount could be allowed to anyone else. Warner exposed their interpretation as being arbitrary and specious, and GPO has since dropped this argument.

Superintendent of Documents LaBarre claims to have made great efforts to sell old publications rather than destroy them. On several occasions, he says, publications were offered to used-book dealers and college bookstores on a bid basis, but only one bid was returned, and that was less than the amount the scrap dealer offered, so the documents were destroyed.

This effort, however, was somewhat halfhearted. Instead of having the sales department try to contact and influence second-hand and remainder book dealers, the job was given to the people in GPO who sell scrap paper and publications for recycling. Whether or not this bureaucratic decision was the cause of the less than enthusiastic response from remainder dealers, the implication of that decision is clear: GPO did not try very hard to sell them.

GPO officials admit that they never make discount offers to the general public through either special no-

tices or regular catalogs. "I can't afford to advertise," said Earl G. Clement, GPO's Director of Document Sales. But he continues to display a disturbingly callous attitude toward the public: "Even if we gave this stuff away we couldn't get anyone to take it, and if we got them to take it they wouldn't read it," he said.

This insensitivity of GPO officials to the potential uses of the destroyed publications implies a lack of interest in whether or not their publications are read. One need only look at the sales division of SupDocs to have such a suspicion confirmed. As perhaps the least aggressive marketing officers in the world, the members of the sales division reflect perfectly the beleaguered mentality of GPO's service to the public.

Other than the Monthly Catalog, the index of all GPO publications which is used primarily by libraries, there are three primary tools for advertising GPO's documents. The first of these, the List of Selected U.S. Government Publications, is by far the most widely used. With an average of about 150 titles per monthly issue, the Selected List is sent to 951,000 people or groups. Below that, there are about 20,000 subscribers to Subject Bibliographies for each subject, and notifications of 80

individual publications are sent periodically to about 318,000 addresses. Assuming the unlikely event that none of these lists overlaps the other, the total number of people reached is not conducive to complacency, given the potential audience.

The marketing department's activities have actually been reduced in the last several years. At one time, the Selected List was sent to 1.6 million addresses, almost twice the size of the number today. GPO officials made a deliberate attempt to reduce their promotion level until they could solve their distribution problems, according to Don Quaid, GPO's marketing officer. This reduction in advertising taints GPO's success in reducing its back orders in the early 70's.

Members of the sales department are both frank about their problems and timid about advancing new ideas. Don Quaid admits, "We don't know our audience." The notifications, which are a small attempt to direct specific types of publications to particular groups are, he says, "not a well-publicized thing." According to Quaid, all big decisions on sales are made upstairs by the Superintendent of Documents, Carl LaBarre. The sales division would like to implement new programs, but suffers from

the handcuffs of a budget so small that all it can do is maintain the status quo.

LaBarre seems content with the GPO's present efforts; a retired Navy supply officer, he has overseen the correction of GPO's most grievous problems of the early 70's. While no one should deny him the praise he deserves for this turnaround, LaBarre is nonetheless smug about what amounts to a mere restoration of limited competence. While tout- ing the increases in GPO's nationwide bookstore program and while making vague promises about future marketing programs ("I have plans, I always have plans"), LaBarre excuses his slow pace by saying that his hands are tied by the need to be self-supporting. By leaving him financially on his own, Congress has given him a "carte blanche" to run his operation as he pleases.

Caution apparently pleases LaBarre. Rather than investing in increased advertising and risking a temporary deficit of revenue, SupDocs has depended on sales to those who already want or must have publications at any price. Because of the uniqueness of much of the information in government publications, the Superintendent of Documents has a guaranteed clientele; he need not beat the bushes for customers who don't already subscribe.

Professional users of statistics know what they want and where they can get it; they will pay, reluctantly, whatever price is necessary.

The Superintendent of Documents division of GPO was established as a central location for information and acquisition of government publications, but GPO has both allowed and encouraged a fragmentation of this responsibility. Like the production side of GPO, SupDocs has chosen to perform only a part of its duty, and to perform that part only satisfactorily rather than well.

The burden for advertising the publications has been handed over by SupDocs in part to the agencies that produce them. "They're the ones who have the big advertising budgets," says Quaid, "let them do it." Certainly the agencies have more interest in the success of their publications than does GPO, but the main point is avoided: the fundamental reason for the existence of SupDocs is to provide a central source of information and supply. To argue that the budget isn't large enough, and to acquiesce meekly to Congress' financial strictures is for GPO to accept the denial of its purpose.

Not only does GPO abdicate responsibility for advertising publications within its jurisdiction, but it

no longer has sole legal authorization for the distribution of documents. There are two other groups which selectively acquire government publications in their particular areas, and advertise them independently of GPO: The National Technical Information Service and the Consumer Information Center.

NTIS

The National Technical Information Service is part of the Commerce Department, is supposed to be a clearinghouse for scientific publications and government contracted information (it has a budget of approximately \$1,186,000), and was probably created to do a job that GPO was barely doing at all.

One of this organization's problems is its omission from the depository library program, which applies only to publications printed by GPO. Only about five percent of all NTIS titles are cross-listed in GPO's Monthly Catalog that libraries use, and NTIS claims to have its own lines of communication established with the libraries. Just recently have depository libraries gained the right to get NTIS publications free, but they are limited to microform copies, since that is the form in which GPO acquires them from NTIS.

Furthermore, even NTIS displays a desire to divest itself of advertising and promotion responsibilities. When the Senate Appropriations Committee asked who was responsible for listing publications in the Monthly Catalog and distributing them to the depositories, NTIS responded, "In light of the June 27, 1975 decision of the Comptroller-General of the United States, the agencies are responsible."¹¹ Once again, a group that was designed to have some central authority has taken the easy road of letting someone else do its job.

NTIS and GPO are competitors in the acquisition of publications that have borderline jurisdiction; in many cases the agency or department is allowed to choose which service it wants and sometimes NTIS puts GPO in a better light. According to Carl LaBarre, "The NTIS sometimes charges three times what I charge for the same product." GPO would like this to nullify any criticism of their prices, but because NTIS may be terrible doesn't mitigate the fact that GPO is bad.

CIC

The Consumer Information Center is a better example of what the GPO could do to promote publications if it were more aggressive. Established in 1970 as part of

the General Services Administration, CIC disseminates consumer-oriented publications printed by the government and, as in the case of NTIS, was established to do a job that should have been SupDoc's responsibility.

About 60 percent of CIC's publications are free-- which is probably why CIC gets nearly as many orders for publications as GPO (3.6 million orders for CIC in 1977, compared to 4.3 million orders for GPO in 1974). Another factor may be that on an advertising budget of about \$225,000, CIC uses an aggressive marketing campaign including public service announcements on radio and television, and articles in newspapers generated by frequent press releases. In its quarterly Consumer Information Catalog, CIC lists about 250 titles per year, and distributes between fifteen and twenty-one million catalogs annually (compared with GPO's Select List of less than one million).

It is startling that CIC consists entirely of an eighteen person staff in charge of all activities other than the actual filling of orders, which is done by GPO's warehouse personnel in Pueblo, Colorado. On a budget of \$4,731,000 for fiscal 1978, three-quarters of which is paid to GPO for its Pueblo services, CIC's budget is

tiny compared to SupDoc's, and its relative success puts GPO to shame.

GPO even tries to assume credit for some of CIC's success: of those publications CIC lists that are not free, GPO collects the revenue, since it alone may receive money for the publications it sells. A GAO study concluded, "Since the Center sells GPO publications at the GPO price and GPO fills the orders, we believe that the Center is essentially advertising GPO publications for GPO" ¹² Also, in his statement to a Senate Appropriations subcommittee in March of last year, Public Printer Boyle boasted about the growing success of the consumer information program, although GPO plays no part in its promotion or growth. ¹³ It is apparent that GPO is content to let this small organization carry the weight of its responsibility to inform ordinary consumers about subjects that interest them.

In all fairness, CIC has a few advantages that SupDocs lacks. Most of CIC's catalogs are mailed out free by Congressmen; CIC has the opportunity to select only highly popular publications to sell; and most of those documents are given away, whereas GPO must sell all of its publications. And, of course, CIC's sales program is

directly supported by appropriations.

Nor is CIC flawless. It, too, destroys those documents that remain after two years (although they have tried once to give them away). Also, CIC's officials admit they appeal primarily to middle and upper-middle class citizens because those are the ones who tend to respond most often. "Unfortunately these are not the people who need a lot of the publications that would help them save money," says Tom Catlin, a CIC officer. CIC lets the agencies advertise and distribute those publications that the law requires the poor must have on a regular basis, but fail to reach a majority of Americans; it seems that Congress is satisfied with the state of things as they are rather than a better program.

Because the responsibility for advertising and distributing government publications is split up among GPO, CIC, NTIS, and the various agencies and departments, there is no central locus of government information. What should be the responsibility of one group is fragmented among many. The only possible result of such disorganization is public confusion and overall governmental indifference to the complete needs of the public. A rational and sensitive redirection is desperately needed.

A Plan For The Future

In considering solutions for the problems and deficiencies of the documents branch of GPO, I am not proposing to change radically the basic idea behind it: it should remain the central point for familiar, fast, and inexpensive access to documents subsidized by the public. At present, the public is treated as a burden to the smooth workings of the government, but the people's interests must come first when shaping a new structure for the dissemination of information.

From the preceding arguments, certain conclusions should be evident:

1. The name Superintendent of Documents should be dropped. It is an unattractive and bureaucratic-sounding name. A more appropriate name such as the Public Information Agency (PIA) would help to dissociate the new organization from the problems of the past as well.

2. PIA should be separated from the GPO. It should be an independent unit, whose decisions are based not on the politics and problems of a parent organization, but rather upon the needs of the public it serves. Independent and purposeful thinking cannot take place as long as PIA is part of the larger GPO mindset which sees

itself as being constantly under fire.

3. CIC and NTIS should be abolished and their functions should be absorbed by PIA. Moreover, PIA should greatly expand the number of groups to which it tries to appeal. It should work closely with schools and libraries, and it should consider itself a resource for public information first rather than a profit-minded business.

4. Pricing:

a. No publication's price should exceed the actual cost of its printing, binding, and postage costs. The cost of the service that the government provides should be borne by all citizens, rather than burdening a person because he exercises his civic duty when he reads a government publication. By limiting the costs included in the price of publications sold to the public, Congress will have an incentive to eliminate waste and duplication in PIA. Duplicity will be easier to detect, too.

b. All publications sent to libraries, schools, and other such institutions should be free. The wealth of information in government publications would be marvelous for financially strapped public schools. The depository library program should be continued so that

some libraries will have complete sets of government publications. The costs of the additional copies would be insignificant in comparison to what the public would gain.

c. Any department, agency, or other producer of government printing should be able to specify, with a set of guidelines and Congressional provisions, that any publication should be free to the public. If a publication is offered free to anyone, it should be free to everyone. If there is a charge, everyone should have to pay it.

d. Publications whose prices are still prohibitively high should, with PIA's or the department's recommendation, be reduced to a reasonable level. Documents such as the Congressional Record must be kept within the price range of the consumer.

5. In its advertising policies, PIA should be required each year to show how it has tried to identify and direct publications to particular interest groups in the public. This would be similar to what CIC and NTIS do now.

One result of this change would be to identify and alter those publications that the public has no interest in or doesn't need. Presently, most of the 25,000 titles

that GPO lists in the Monthly Catalog are never seen. We cannot know whether the public has any interest in them because they don't even know that such publications exist. If a department or agency were required to consider the public's interests and needs before spending its money, then the production of truly unneeded material could be stopped. The lines of communication between government and citizens could be opened more if the government made a greater effort to inform the public about its activities.

6. Opening the resources of the government to the public:

a. Although the United States Government funds a significant amount of the scientific and technical research in the country, the results are printed in exclusive journals that libraries and schools must purchase at high prices. As a stipulation in all grants, the results of any research that is wholly or partially supported by the government should have concurrent publication in a government document. It would be wrong to deny the right of individuals to have their works published elsewhere as well, but the government should have equal right to it.

b. Work done by citizens that is judged by PIA to be in the public interest should be printed as

well. The requirements should be that the work cannot be published elsewhere, and that it does not duplicate information already printed by the government. In this capacity as a publisher of last resort, PIA should provide requesting individuals whose work is rejected with a simple written explanation.

Obviously, in this capacity as a publisher, PIA must alter the existing copyright laws to protect the rights of citizens who publish with the government, and to protect the government against the content of the publications.

Conclusion

The Government Printing Office is the collapsed center of a sprawling and irrational system of printing and distributing government information. Information, the life-blood of our government and country, must be allowed to flow through open channels from, to, and within the government. The present system is clogged and decaying. Change cannot be partial or selective; it must be comprehensive, and it must be motivated by one dominant thought: the government's printers must serve the whole government, and the whole government must serve the whole public.

We must have a return to a rational and responsive locus of public information. We must construct a center that will hold.

end

Notes

1. Edwin R. Lannon, "Toward Order Out of the Present Chaos in Federal Printing/Publishing Policy." Printing Impressions. October 1977. p.10F.
2. U.S. Government Printing Office, 100 GPO Years; a history of United States public printing. Washington. 1961. pp. 21-22.
3. Hearings before the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, fiscal year 1979. pp. 400-401.
4. Chester G. Hall, Jr., "Control of Public Printing." Paper delivered at the American University, Washington, D.C. October 1960. p. 32.
5. Hall, pp. 43-44.
6. Hearings before the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch of the House Committee on Appropriations for fiscal year 1978. p. 651.
7. Op.Cit. Hearings on the Legislative Branch, Senate Appropriations Committee. p. 398.
8. GAO report "Government Printing Operation Improvements Since 1974." February 22, 1977. p. iv.
9. Hearings before the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch of the House Committee on Appropriations for fiscal year 1977. p. 431.
10. LeRoy C. Schwarzkopf, "Pricing of GPO Sales Publications," reprint of paper. College Park, Maryland. September 1976.
11. NTIS response to submitted questions for Senate Appropriations Hearings for fiscal 1978. p. 309.
12. GAO report, "The General Services Administration's Consumer Information Center." February 23, 1978. p. 19.
13. Op.Cit. Hearings on the Legislative Branch, Senate Appropriations Committee. p. 399.

APPENDIX A

TOP 30 CONTRACTORS PRINTING PROCURED COMMERCIALLY ALL OFFICES COMBINED OCTOBER 1977 THROUGH MARCH 1978

1. Braceland Brothers	6,373,657
2. Craftsman Press	5,654,719
3. Custom Printing Company	4,716,207
4. Eagle Press Corp.	4,641,528
5. Moore Business Forms	3,404,765
6. Publication Press	3,154,046
7. Fry Communications, Inc.	3,090,644
8. Baltimore Business Forms	2,992,198
9. McGregor Printing Corp.	2,480,048
10. Columbia Planograph Co.	2,048,855
11. Hoover-Dayton Co.	1,887,715
12. McDonald & Eudy	1,556,398
13. Xidex Corporation	1,363,308
14. Webcraft Packaging, Inc.	1,339,772
15. Goodway Graphics of VA.	1,314,322
16. Wessel Company	1,290,440
17. Urban Litho. Inc.	1,253,354
18. Media Press	1,194,478
19. Cato Show Printing Co.	1,180,743
20. Elgin Business Forms	1,003,081
21. News Printing Co., Inc.	873,208
22. Arnold Graphic Industries	818,279
23. Art Litho	776,029
24. Litho Press of San Antonio	766,025
25. Di-Line Lithograph Co.	763,275
26. Standard Register Co.	712,919
27. Maryland Litho	703,314
28. Publishers Book Bindery	682,578
29. Sturgis Newport Business Forms	672,583
30. Pearl Pressman Liberty	651,523
TOTAL (30 CONTRACTORS)	\$59,360,011

TOTAL PRINTING PROCURED FOR THIS PERIOD \$133,906,623

30 CONTRACTORS PRODUCED 44% OF TOTAL

APPENDIX A (Cont.)

SECOND 30 CONTRACTORS PRINTING PROCURED COMMERCIALY ALL REGIONS COMBINED OCTOBER 1977 THROUGH MARCH 1978

31. Avery Label Systems	639,500
32. Federal Lithograph Co.	584,611
33. Port City Press	583,401
34. Franklin Printing Co.	576,265
35. Unified Data Products	575,515
36. Datafold Forms	573,022
37. A. Hoen & Co.	567,633
38. Hospital Forms & Systems Corp.	544,548
39. Dennison Manufacturing Co.	537,709
40. Williams & Heintz Co.	533,567
41. Reproductions, Inc.	529,951
42. Zabel Brothers Co.	525,524
43. Allied Printing Service	516,611
44. Hammond Business Forms	509,623
45. Gateway Press	507,811
46. Economy Printing Concern	505,926
47. Uarco, Inc.	502,869
48. Pace Press, Inc.	499,759
49. Mid City Press	494,163
50. McGill Printing, Inc.	483,953
51. United Lithographic Service	471,031
52. Rand McNally & Co.	454,407
53. Boise Cascade Envelope Div.	446,414
54. John Roberts Co.	426,736
55. Editors Press	425,927
56. Studio Printing Co.	416,672
57. Nashua Corporation	414,420
58. Hall Lithographing Co.	393,175
59. Columbia Printing Co.	386,694
60. Michael Roger Press	382,591

Average per-lb price paid by Government Printing Office for the contract periods listed below, for types of paper indicated.

Quarterly Proposal for Period Beginning	Type of Paper							
	Heat-Set and White Offset Bk. (Sheets & Rolls)		Coated (Sheets)		Writing (Sheets & Rolls)		Newsprint (Rolls)	
	Price	Index	Price	Index	Price	Index	Price	Index
2/72	\$0.1237	100% (base)	\$0.2261	100% (base)	\$0.1318	100% (base)	\$0.0820	100% (base)
5/72	0.1279	103.4%	0.2193	96.9%	0.1360	103.2%		
8/72	0.1412	114.2%	0.2192	96.9%	0.1452	110.2%		
11/72	0.1523	123.1%	0.2270	100.4%	0.1551	117.7%		
2/73	\$0.1675	135.4%	\$0.2397	106.0%	\$0.1635	124.1%	\$0.0925	112.8%
5/73	0.2046	165.4%	--	--	0.1992	151.1%		
8/73	0.2383	192.6%	--	--	0.3409	258.6%		
11/73	0.2982	241.1%	--	--	0.3290	249.6%		
2/74	\$0.3228	261.0%	\$0.3043	134.6%	\$0.3611	273.9%	\$0.1125*	137.2%
5/74	0.3413	275.9%	--	--	0.4064	308.3%		
8/74	0.3824	309.1%	0.3157	139.6%	0.4416	335.1%		
11/74	0.3054	246.9%	0.3072	135.9%	0.3442	261.2%		
2/75	\$0.2314	187.0%	\$0.2798	123.8%	\$0.2557	194.0%	\$0.1402*	171.0%
5/75	0.2000	161.7%	0.2719	120.3%	0.2193	166.4%		
8/75	0.2001	161.8%	0.2739	121.1%	0.2169	164.6%		
11/75	0.1993	161.1%	0.2961	131.0%	0.2452	186.0%		

* Does not include Warehousing.

Open Market purchases generally follow the same trend as the Contract purchases.

Quarterly Proposal for Period Beginning	Type of Paper							
	Heat-Set and White Offset Bk. (Sheets & Rolls)		Coated (Sheets)		Writing (Sheets & Rolls)		Newsprint (Rolls)	
	Price	Index	Price	Index	Price	Index	Price	Index
2/76	\$0.2440	197.3%	\$0.3230	142.9%	\$0.2576	195.4%	\$0.12088	147.4%
5/76	0.2526	204.2%	0.3243	143.4%	0.2763	209.6%		
8/76	0.2543	205.6%	0.3384	149.7%	0.2644	200.6%		
11/76	0.2469	199.6%	0.3403	150.7%	0.2850	216.2%		
2/77	\$0.2420	195.6%	\$0.3442	152.2%	\$0.2900	220.0%	\$0.14182	173.0%
5/77	0.2600	210.2%	--	--	0.3036	230.3%		
8/77	0.2679	216.6%	0.3688	163.1%	0.3165	240.1%		
11/77	0.2527	204.3%	0.3903	172.6%	0.2931	222.4%		
2/78	\$0.2483	200.7%	\$0.3863	170.9%	\$0.2866	217.5%	\$0.1670	203.7%
5/78	0.2678	216.5%	0.4039	178.6%	0.3115	236.3%	4/78 --- 0.1780	217.1%
8/78	0.3105	251.0%	0.4136	182.9%	0.3480	264.0%	price increase .	

Open Market purchases generally follow the same trend as the Contract purchases.