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Colin Jones-President and Publisher-Routledge, US

Katina Strauch

Against the Grain

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ATG Interview with Colin Jones

President and Publisher — Routledge, U.S. <jones@routledge.com>

by Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*)

ATG: Hello. Why don't we begin this interview discussing the huge changes at Routledge. There is substantial growth taking place, yes?

CJ: There is, yes. Routledge has now been returned to private ownership. Shortly after this I was brought in as President of Routledge Inc. with the task of making sure that the company continue to be the major world publisher of serious non-fiction it is, and to grow it to make it even better. So, growth, yes. Planned reorganization, strengthening, growth and expansion. There are three major goals: to re-emphasize the commitment Routledge has to excellence, to accelerate Routledge's book and professional journal acquisition program, especially in North America, and to restore the company to its traditional fiscal soundness. To do this we are reinvesting in subjects in which we have traditionally published and we are also starting new U.S. lists in Psychology, Economics, Business and Management, and particularly in the area of reference where, under the direction of our newly hired Vice President and Associate Publisher, **Ken Wright**, Routledge will make measured strides towards becoming as well known for its list of must-have, American-based reference titles as it is for the rest of its list. Of course we already have an extensive British-based reference list too, and that will continue, and grow as well.

ATG: You were the director at New York University Press for 15 years and previously were senior editor at Free Press. I believe that you also worked for Cambridge University Press. So you've seen both sides of the fence. You've once again left life at a great university press for life with a commercial publisher...

CJ: Life at university presses is in many ways similar to life at commercial presses. To begin with, it's essential as a first step to be economically self-sufficient in one way or another, that is to say you either make money to keep your program going yourself or you arrange for a subsidy. Since there was no subsidy at NYU Press, nor ever any discussion of one, I had to make NYU self-sufficient immediately upon arrival. We paid our way at NYU, and we built a good list in the process. So, it can be done. And I wonder what difference there is really and finally between that and

what we are doing here at Routledge.

I look back on my years at NYU with a great deal of pleasure. I felt I'd be there for life, but last fall I had a call from a recruiter who introduced me to the new owners of Routledge. The new owners were interested in having exactly the sort of company I was interested in running, a growing, international publishing company that specialized in serious non-fiction. It seemed to me a happy match.

At the time Routledge had just been sold by **International Thomson** which had owned the company for eight years but had tired of it, and this in turn had left a number of the Routledge staff, especially in New York, disappointed, unhappy, and angry. So, to begin with there was a stalled program, which always happens when a company changes hands, as well as the serious problem of poor staff morale which was only to be expected: the staff had not been well treated. I had faced a similar situation when I became Director of the NYU Press except that was worse. NYU Press had faced the real possibility of being closed down. But NYU came back from the brink to where it is now, so I thought, "Well, heading the team that fixes Routledge would be well worth doing, and I think I can do that." So I accepted, and here I am.

As to the contrast between a university press and Routledge — one of Routledge's great advantages is that is now independently owned. In the case of a university press — any university press — there are many local considerations, and not only faculty needs, that must be taken into con-

sideration. But in Routledge's case, here we are a publisher, and that's it. That is our mandate and we don't need to worry about anything else other than keeping it going. The advantage Routledge has over being part of a larger publishing conglomerate is that with a conglomerate as a corporate owner the wishes of the parent must of course finally prevail. In Routledge's case, however, we are the only major book publishing company our parent, **Cinven**, owns. Cinven bought us because they liked us and thought the company's basis was sound and our program worthwhile. That's a fine backer to have!

ATG: Tell us more about Cinven, this company which currently owns Routledge.

CJ: Cinven, based in London, is one of Europe's leading venture capital companies. It is wholly owned by its management team. It manages in excess of two billion dollars, invests broadly in profitable businesses with established market positions. It looks for companies with a combination of high-level brand name recognition, respected product quality, strong technical expertise and firm cost control. Routledge is the major publisher in their portfolio. **Bob Kiernan**, previously Group Managing Director of several companies that included Routledge, took a vital part in organizing the sale of the company from Thomson to Cinven in mid-1996, and is now our Chairman of the Board. I report directly to him.

ATG: Tell us more about the Cinven take-over.

CJ: Well, Routledge found itself (through no fault of its own) in a period of well-publicized uncertainty in early to mid 1996, particularly in the USA, once Thomson had decided to sell the company. The difficulties were caused, I think, primarily because of a corporate indecision that was allowed to persist. There wasn't anything wrong with Routledge as a company — quite the reverse — but people didn't know what was going on, and a number were understandably thinking of leaving the company to assure their livelihood. It was demoralized and I had to set out to change that, and we are changing that. In fact, we HAVE changed it. Routledge is a pretty happy place now, humming, up-and-running, and it has to be, since once again we're back publishing a thousand books a year, and you can't

do that unless the operation is in pretty good basic shape with a good team willing to work together as a team, doing what we do best, publish good books. Anyway, the hope and intent, both mine and Cinven's, is to reemphasize Routledge as a publisher of the very best materials in the social sciences and the humanities, publishing for a broad, university-based or related audience worldwide. It is in a structural sense comparable to the great international University Presses, Oxford and Cambridge, except we are owned by private investors and not by a parent university, and publishing is our sole business. We intend to build and expand.

ATG: Tell us more about the history of Routledge.

CJ: Routledge is almost 175 years old. It was founded by **George Routledge**, and was perhaps best known as the publisher of **Bertrand Russell**, **Carl Jung** and **Karl Popper**. It remained as an independent company until it was bought in 1988 by **International Thomson** at the same time Thomson bought **Methuen**, **Croom Helm** and **Tavistock**. These latter companies were then amalgamated into one larger company which took the name of Routledge. The company was based in London. The amalgamation went well until 1994, when corporate control was moved from London to Connecticut. But this didn't seem to have been a successful move, and Thomson shortly afterwards decided to sell the company. Then, shortly after I accepted the position of President of Routledge Inc., and here we are!

ATG: What sort of editorial changes are you making?

CJ: Making changes to get Routledge back where it was. This means publishing for our core audiences in and out of academia, paying close attention to the needs of the upper levels of the undergraduate curriculum, taking advantage where we can of backlist strength, trying to publish in subjects in which the company has traditionally been strong and in which we wish to be strong. We have an earned reputation for content and innovation and we want to keep that. Above all we want to sign up and publish more books with many levels of readership. **Bill Germano**, a natural and brilliant scholarly editor, stuck with Routledge during the sale of the company, and he has now been appointed Publishing Director, Humanities. We are investing heavily in our Acquisitions team in the USA which now consists of 17 new positions at various levels. This acquisition team is led by Associate Publisher **Ken Wright** (who has joined us from **Henry Holt**), **Bill**

Germano, **Heidi Freund** (Publishing Director for the Behavioral Sciences), and **Melissa Rosati**, (Publishing Director for Business, Economics, and Management). These four people have extensive experience in publishing, good judgment and good editorial management skills. They represent various streams of non-fiction publishing — Bill came from a university press (Columbia), Heidi from college publishing, Melissa from trade publishing, and Ken from another university press (Oxford) and subsequently reference publishing. I want to stitch the experience from these four strands together in a way that is useful for our program as a whole. At this point of course I have done my bit. The rest is now up to these others. But I am very confident they will succeed!

I am a strong believer in the importance of important reference works for a list of our sort. We have the upcoming Routledge *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1998), a project which began six years ago and which will be available in hardcopy and electronically. Since my arrival we have acquired several very important new reference projects including the two-volume *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia* edited by **Paula Hyman** (Yale) and **Deborah Dash Moore** (Vassar) slated for publication this fall, a six-volume set on **Malcolm X** edited by **James Cone** (Union Theological Seminary), an *Encyclopedia of Colonial America*, edited by **Gordon Wood** (Brown) and an *Encyclopedia of Religion in the United States*, edited by **Lawrence Sullivan** (Harvard). These will all be important books and, I believe one can fairly say, publishing events.

ATG: What's your position on print versus electronic, or should I say print and electronic?

CJ: Print continues to be a significant way of looking at material. There is a significant market out there for print. Electronic requires a huge capital-intensive investment, and while NYU

wasn't willing to make the investment. I think we at Routledge need and are able to think on a larger scale.

ATG: Where did you get your interest in publishing? How did your career get started?

CJ: Well, when I was growing up in England I never thought I wanted to do anything else, though I had no idea how I would ever get into the profession. And it happened that just at the time I was getting my degree at Cambridge and didn't have the foggiest idea of what to do, I had the chance to come on a trip to the US on holiday with a friend. We thought we'd each take a temporary job, stay a while, buy a car and drive across America. Hopelessly unrealistic, needless to say, but happily so, since what was planned as a four-month jaunt lasted over 30 pretty fine years! Once in America, I stumbled into a job as a "college traveler" which had me driving across the country persuading faculty to adopt textbooks. I was quite mesmerized by the experience, all these campuses with different levels of education, serving different purposes, with ranges of educational possibilities. In Europe 35 years ago we only imagined such rich and fascinating possibilities. I had a fabulous

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territory only someone who was either intensely curious or clueless or both (i.e. me) would take: New Jersey on the east, Colorado on the west, Minnesota on the north, Texas on the south, and everything in between. Happily, it was impossible to spend any money because I was driving all the time, great for capital accumulation, useful since I was penniless. Then I was promoted to an in-house editor in New York, got a job helping open an editorial office for the **Cambridge University Press** in New York, where I found that having been a college traveler was invaluable. I very much believe that editors need to expose themselves to all sides of the sales process; they should go to sales conferences and spend time seeing how difficult it is to get their books out and sold. Selling is a very necessary, sometimes a humbling experience. All editors should be exposed to this side of the business. It will make them much better!

ATG: *What's the role of the library market in your sales?*

CJ: About 30% of Routledge sales are to libraries and library wholesalers and the rest is to individuals, bookstores and through trade wholesalers. I would like to see the library market grow. I think it will if our books are perceived as essential to libraries. The key is to persuade our reference department to bring in the right products (be they print or electronic), and that brings me back to what I said above, the need for the editor to know what the audience wants and having the ability to match that to the very best that is available, and making everything work.

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Routledge is almost 175-years-old. It is one of the world's largest publishers of quality trade non-fiction, scholarly and reference books, specializing in the humanities, social sciences, business and economics, theater arts and popular culture. Its entire list is published and distributed worldwide under the Routledge imprint.

Routledge also owns **Carfax Inc.**, publisher of almost 200 professional journals in the social sciences, education and health care. Carfax has its main offices in Abingdon, England. Routledge operates out of offices in New York and London, and is wholly owned by **Cinven**, one of Europe's leading venture capital companies.

ATG: *I know at the beginning of the summer, you just acquired Carfax which publishes, I believe, several hundred journals. Are you trying to expand your journal list?*

CJ: Routledge has some 40 journals of its own and we do plan to grow this program selectively. Carfax is significantly larger, publishing about 200 journals some of which are in fields we have not covered. So the plan is for Carfax to continue from its base in Abingdon, England, as an independent company, parallel to our own. **John Cox** [President of Carfax] and I are talking about ways of cooperating in the USA, combining exhibit space, having Routledge publish topical issues of Carfax journals as separate books etc. We intend to expand on this cooperation where we can.

ATG: *What's the role of bookstores in your sales?*

CJ: About 40% of our sales are through the book trade in the US. I would not like for it to be much higher, because the combination of low prices, high discounts and frightening returns makes it financially unappealing. However, to some extent we need to be visible in the trade, so we are there. To have our books on the bookstore's shelves is a kind of editorial

advertisement for us.

I believe the independent bookstores will stay around if they are in the right place and if they can specialize in some way or other. They can't compete across the board, but in particular subject areas, or particular specialties they can. In the long run, I do not believe that specialized books will find much of a place in the big chains. There just isn't enough turn-over for the very specialized book, and this is being demonstrated in this year's and last year's awful returns. The hope was that a trade market existed for some university press type books, but by and large that hope has not been realized.

It will be a struggle for the independents to reassert themselves as the natural outlet for books from publishers such as ourselves and the university presses. It is hard to hang on, but there is a need to be filled, and I believe it will be. Booksellers and publishers are similarly determined people, and we publishers certainly need the independents very, very much. 🍄

NB: *Colin Jones says that we all need to be more positive about books and publishing. I think he's right. Hope he makes it to Charleston so we can continue the discussion. — KS*

Op-Ed

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executive of **AT&T**, who expressed pleasure that over half of the world's population had yet to make a phone call. What was he doing at a conference concerned with publishing? Would you invite a highway engineer to a conference on the joys of travel? Communications is a wonderful business, but it's not the one we're in.

In three full pages in the *Herald Tribune* of 27th March 1997, the **Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation** unsurprisingly quoted the words of their president **Mr. Jun-ichiro Miyazu**: "If we ignore the social change brought about by the aggressive progress of digital technology, we won't be able to find the real direction of the multimedia society." This is self-serving gobble-dyook. Because the communications companies have invested untold millions in optical fibers, society is supposed to change.

But those who see print as seminal to the human condition should not denigrate or dismiss the digital doodahs. They are homogenizing humanity with consequences yet unconjured, and sweeping along with them those sections of the publishing industry concerned with information-gathering and dissemination. The rest of the publishing industry is being confused by the fact that the print culture has long regarded numbers sold and speed of delivery — the very heart of

the electronic wonder — as the criteria of success and the foundation of economic viability. The potential of the one discriminating reader has been reduced to the statistic of just another copy sold. There is a one-to-one-ness in paper publishing which should be a matter for quiet reflection amid the noise of the electronic talkfest.

Among publishers of professional information, paper today suffers from declining expectations. In the '70s and '80s, publishing for professions became a pot of gold and the expectations of management and shareholders became correspondingly high. Such companies now have the conundrum of maintaining their high ratios while investing in the electronic media. The actual value to the reader of paper publishing is being overlooked.

The non-print media have become the province of the large corporations whose postures of dynamism and vision must conceal, or, if they don't, should conceal, an inner nervousness. One symptom of this is the way in which the players increasingly make deals with one another on grounds of focusing on their core businesses. I find it troubling when profits become the desideratum instead of the corollary, and when the only way to satisfy shareholders is to cut expenses and people. Publishing is by definition a business with a social conscience, a way of making a modest living, not a fortune.

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