

J. N. M.

Group Chairman

27th September, 1968.

Speech at Press Conference on 3rd October 1968
at 11.30 a.m.

Attached is a suggested draft for your speech at the Press Conference.

No doubt you will want to change it around to suit your own style but I think it covers the main point - which is why Bookers are giving the prize.

I cannot let you have du Sautoy's speech because he is in Canada. But at our meeting on Wednesday October 2nd we will have either the full text of it or notes on the ground it will cover.

At that time it may be necessary to make some alteration to what is suggested here but I cannot imagine that anything he is going to say will alter your speech too drastically. In any case we shall have due warning by Wednesday.

Mr. Chairman, my lords, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to thank Mr. du Sautoy for his kind words about Booker McConnell.

We in Bookers believe that there is a real need for a prize such as the Booker Prize. Mr. du Sautoy has explained this need more clearly than I could. He has told you that the Publishers' Association and Bookers together have great hopes for the success of this prize.

The only interesting point I can add to what he has said is to tell you why Bookers have decided to back the project. A general dissertation on the subject of industrial patronage of the arts might be interesting, even fascinating, but don't worry, I will stick to my company and this particular prize.

The Booker Group, of which Booker McConnell is the parent company, is a widespread group of companies. We operate in many countries throughout the Commonwealth. We sell a wide variety of goods throughout the world. We believe that a good and efficient company should so conduct its affairs as to make an optimum profit over the long term. To do this we must recognise our responsibility not only to shareholders but also to customers, employees and the societies among whom we operate.

So there are some actions which a company should, I believe, take without hope of immediate gain. This does not mean that one should cast around for worthwhile projects that are irrelevant to the company's activities. That would be sloppy-minded. What we in Bookers try to do is to be sensitive to the needs of the areas in which we operate. And by areas I mean both geographical areas and areas of enterprise.

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Let me give you an example.

Bookers began in British Guiana, as it was then called, over 150 years ago and we are still closely committed to Guyana, as it now is. When that country became independent in 1966, Bookers marked this step forward by giving to the new University of Guyana, amongst other things, the means to endow a fellowship in the History of Guyana. Now, the History of Guyana was a subject and body of learning conspicuous by its absence. Here, particularly for a new nation, was a major gap. And here we saw was an opportunity to fill that gap.

I believe the analogy holds good for the book world. Bookers have recently become involved in the world of books by our investment in authors' companies. Because of this we became aware of a gap, of an unfulfilled need for a literary prize of a substantial kind with all that can flow from it. Our discussions with the Publishers Association reinforced our own view most strongly. And so, seeing this need in an area in which we operate, what could be more natural than for Bookers to give the Booker Prize for Fiction.

And in setting up such a prize, we could not have hoped for better partners than Peter du Sautoy and his colleagues of the Publishers' Association.