

THE EDITOR'S PAGE

by Mike Street

THE NEW PROFESSIONALS AND US

CONTRADICTIONS

In thirteen years of producing magazines for stamp collectors no other article I have edited has brought as much strong response, pro and con, as Robert Pratt's *The New Professionals and Us* in the September-October *TOPICS*.

One member, a dealer, wrote to say that the article would have been better if the part criticizing dealers had been constructive instead of "Us versus Them", and if it had been handled directly in correspondence rather than in print. He also felt that Pratt's article was more suited to the trade papers or a newsletter, not a specialist journal such as *TOPICS*. Another member, also a dealer, wrote to say that the article was a very important piece and congratulated me for printing it.

Jeff Switt (see LETTERS) took issue both with Pratt, largely for the tone of his article, and with Pratt and to some extent with me, for not condensing it drastically, at the very least.

YES OR NO?

To print, or not to print, is always the question. The editor of a special interest journal must first decide whether or not the content of an article is pertinent to the interests of the members of the group. If it passes that test, then accuracy of the information and, in an opinion piece, the presence of libelous or slanderous statements, must be gauged.

If these check out, and the editor is not required to spend an inordinate amount of time whipping it into shape, then the article usually gets published. Normally, when an article actually sees print is determined by its importance, and by the number of others which arrived before it did.

The New Professionals and Us commented on the dangers of not using available information, both in creating or compounding errors, and in the very real possibility of people buying wrongly described material. Is there any doubt that these are pertinent to

BNAPSer's interests?

Pratt took to task dealers and authors. As someone who has earned a solid reputation in this field, that was his privilege. Should he have refrained from criticizing one group or the other? In the context, how could he have avoided it? His opinions were strong, but nowhere near libel or slander. For my part, the major criteria were met. There was no question of whether or not to publish.

Should the article have been condensed to a page or so? When editing another's work, one always has to be mindful of the rights and sensibilities of the author, who must be allowed fair leeway to have his or her say. With *The New Professionals and Us*, I removed duplication and some material that seemed extraneous, used a few editorial tools to temper the tone a bit, and printed the remainder.

THROWING STONES

Right after *The New Professionals and Us* appeared John Walsh, one of the people who received a zap from Bob Pratt, phoned me. John was upset because on one point in particular, the date of a backstamp, I had made a judgement call and left out something which would have proved the point (for which I apologized in this space in the last issue).

Bert Warr, whom Pratt acknowledged as having given the same date as Walsh in an article in the *Newfie Newsletter*, also wrote. Bert took exception to the reference to his item in Pratt's article, because his piece included a clear illustration of the backstamp! Had Pratt been a little more careful, he would not have been able to criticize either Walsh or Warr on the point. Nevertheless, Bert agreed with the general thrust of *The New Professionals and Us* in pointing out the danger to the collector when wrong information is printed.

SUMMING UP

I must agree with Jeff Switt's criticism of the tone of Pratt's piece. It wasn't right. Elsewhere in this issue you will find the first in-

stallment of a series by William C. Walton. By an amazing coincidence (some might call it a form of poetic justice), Walton's series concerns Robert Pratt's articles on Newfoundland Postal Stationery which ran in *TOPICS* from 1984 to 1986. As will be seen, he not only adds new information to the original series, but also brings to light and corrects items on which Pratt went astray. The manner in which Walton does this shows that it is quite possible to point out errors without firing artillery.

Should I have printed *The New Professionals and Us*? On balance, given all the points above, yes, I think so - but I won't give it as a shining example when I try for sainthood. Bob Pratt had a valid point to make, one worth putting forward to BNAPSers. His own errors in the article should not detract from this. Bert Warr's position could be summed up as, "Let's not throw out the baby with the bath water," and I believe he's quite right.

I would like to think that all of us have learned something from this.

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