PRODUCTION NOTE

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library
Soviet Book Statistics: A Guide to Their Use and Interpretation

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The problem of evaluating the output and utilization of printed matter remains one of the most evasive subjects encountered in the study of communications. Attempts to define some of the statistical terms used by the library and the publishing business have, by and large, failed to reach any working agreement either internationally or nationally. The Soviet library system, influenced as it is by existing political forces, has made considerable strides in this direction because once a policy has been formulated, or a definition established, it may be enforced throughout the Soviet Union. This paper is planned to illuminate, as far as possible, some of the terms and figures pertaining to the Soviet book industry and to elaborate upon the statistics of Soviet library holdings. Indeed, what do Russian bibliographers and librarians of today consider to be a book and a volume? What is the denominator of the Soviet book statistics? What do the figures to be found in Soviet library literature mean if expressed other than in Soviet terms? Is there any relation between Soviet book industry figures and library figures? What is the proportion between the nominal strength and the functional value of public library book resources in contemporary Russia?

The Soviet national bibliography, Knizhnaia letopis' (Book Annals), gives definite clues as to what the Soviet bibliographers consider to be a book (kniga). A study of this bibliographical weekly reveals that it even includes printed matter containing but one page. Whereas a total of 345 items were listed in this journal within a given week, only twenty-seven, or 8 per cent, represented books of at least 160 pages. (Table I.) The A.L.A. Glossary of Library Terms states that "from a bindery point of view, a pamphlet is any collection of leaves, paper-bound or self-covered, consisting of 64 pages or less." Thus, by this standard 256, or 75 per cent, of the entries pertain to material other than books. An examination of the entries admitted to issue 25 of the 1946 Knizhnaia letopis' indicates that the median number of pages per item is 32. (Table II.) During the last war, when pamphlets were even more predominant in the Soviet book market than at present, library acquisitions consisted primarily of printed matter averaging from twenty-four to thirty-two pages.
The Soviet national bibliography includes many near-print publications such as rotaprints, svetlografii (blueprints) and steklografii. The latter are produced by one of the simplest multi-copy devices known as the steklograf. Many entries are designated as being "without title page," "without cover," "free of charge," or "without price," due to inclusion of such items as government documents, electoral pamphlets, price lists, programs, lecture digests issued by particular schools, and circulars issued by factories and commercial organizations of interest only to the officers of these agencies.

The Soviets themselves do not treat as books the great bulk of the items to be found in Knizhnaia letopis'. Soviet book review statistics disclose that only a negligible part of the approximately 18,000 titles listed in 1946 warranted reviewing. According to the data published by the All-Union Book Chamber in 1954, Soviet newspapers and periodicals had reviewed "2,744 books and articles" during the year of 1946. Not all the 2,744 items reviewed were books since the author of the 1954 report refers to them as "books and articles." The implication seems to be that only one out of eight or nine publications listed in the 1946 Knizhnaia letopis' was reviewed whereas the remaining printed matter was regarded as ephemera. It should be noted that admission of near-print items to the national bibliography was questioned by some Soviet library theoreticians as early as 1930.

The Soviet national bibliography also lists a considerable number of reprints. In the first twenty-five issues of the 1946 Knizhnaia letopis', a 1937 pamphlet by Stalin was observed to reoccur 109 times and a 1946 speech by Stalin was listed, during these six months, as many as 122 times. Another pamphlet, originally drafted in 1936, was listed almost as many times in these twenty-five issues. Moreover, one runs across scores of similar entries relating to the same pamphlets of 1936 and 1937 in other volumes of the Soviet national bibliography.

Statistical terminology employed by the Russian periodical publishers differs from that used in the Western countries. According to the Soviet "book of universal knowledge," Bol'shaia sovetskai entsiklopedia, there was a "total circulation of 104.5 million copies" for the 960 odd bulletins and periodicals issued in the Soviet Union in 1946. This number, however, did not mean that there were 104,500,000 subscribers but referred to the total number of copies printed. For example this encyclopedia stated that, in 1946, the "yearly circulation of the journal, Bol'shevik [now, Kommunist], amounted to 4.8 million copies." Translated into non-Soviet jargon, this meant that the fortnightly, Bol'shevik, published 24 times a year, had enjoyed an actual circulation of 200,000 (4,800,000 = 200,000 x 24). While other Soviet statistics operated with what the Russians call razovyi tirazh, the Soviet encyclopedia used the sum of copies of all the issues (pieces) printed in 1946.
Although book industry statistics seem to suggest that almost everything put in print is worthy of the term, "book," Soviet libraries have reached a somewhat more realistic concept as to the meaning of the term. A special committee set up by the Lenin Memorial Library, Moscow, in 1941, decided that only such printed works as consisted of at least eight pages should be considered as a book. Accordingly, in 1948 M. Klevenskii, director of the Lenin Memorial Library, made the following statement: "One printed leaf is not considered a book even if it is folded and has four pages, but two leaves connected with one another and thus having eight pages already correspond to the idea of a book." Accordingly, "Volume" was defined in the same article when Klevenskii stated: "If we say that the V.I. Lenin Library possesses eleven million, we mean that there are eleven million books, individual issues of journals, and yearly volumes of newspapers." The Gor'kii Regional Library, which is regarded as a model library in its class, employs a similar statistical method. On January 1, 1946, its book resources number 1,681,159 "copies," which consisted of:

- Books in Russian: 900,116
- Books in foreign languages: 66,253
- Books in languages of non-Russian nations of the Soviet Union: 26,421
- Periodicals: 674,421 individual issues

Such definitions and practices eventually led to protests from other Soviet libraries. Mrs. E. Gorokhovskaia, one of the dissenters, opined that this definition of a volume "would scarcely be right and purposeful. Such a solution of the problem will lead to the trituration of the meaning of book resources, to wrong totals concerning the holdings of this or that library." However, her protest was ignored, and library statistics suddenly skyrocketed throughout Russia. Mrs. T. Zueva, chairman of the Committee in Charge of Institutions for Cultural Enlightenment and, since 1953 the Minister of Culture, declared in 1947, that the Lenin Memorial Library occupied "first place in the world as to its book holdings," whereas the second largest was, in her estimate, the Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library with its "more than ten million volumes."

As a rule, public library holdings in all nations are contingent upon the output of the local book industry. The publishers' failure to issue books creates a book shortage in public libraries. It is no wonder that, as a result of Soviet book trade policies, the supply and distribution of much-demanded printed matter in contemporary Russia should seem limited to the non-Soviet inquirer. In the region of Vologda, it was found that the regional Collector, an agency in charge of
supplying 2,750 "mass," trade-union and kolkhoz libraries with most of the reading material purchased by them had received, during the years, 1948 and 1949, only 170 to 440 copies of each "best-seller." During these two years, no city or district library had obtained more than one or two of each desired title and most rural libraries had been apportioned nothing.

An instance of the unpredictable character of book supply channels is depicted in the case cited by N. Lutsenko, librarian-in-chief of a district library: "...Since 1946, I repeatedly submitted to the library Collector various demands for information, but the Collector replied not a single time." Instead of receiving requisitioned books, Lutsenko's library had obtained from nine to fifty copies of books not requested. A similar case occurred in 1952, when the Anadyr District Library accumulated, as a result of this practice, as many as 118 copies of a Pushkin novelette, Dubrovskii, and 300 copies of a travel book by Arsen'ev. Again, the Kovarchinsk Rural Library, in the region of Ivanovo, obtained 1,654 books through the Collector in the course of two years. Among them, however, there had been only forty-five items in such categories as history, geography, history of literature, health, and various other non-fiction classes. The library had been supplied almost exclusively with fiction and Party literature.

In another instance, even one of the outstanding library schools in the Union, the Moscow Library Technicum, barely succeeded in convincing the Collector that an institution preparing children's librarians should be entitled to spend some money on children's books. Permission to supply the Moscow Library Technicum with these books "was not granted immediately," says Mrs. M. Zakharova, director of the school.

Articles in the Russian professional publications indicate that these conditions still exist, certainly, as recently as 1953 and 1954. In the Soviet library journal of 1954 it was reported that during the first four months of the year, many rural libraries had not received a single book from the regional Collector. The 1955 report on the situation of book supply presents a similar picture. According to Metelkin, at mid-century, agricultural books are issued in limited circulations so that libraries often are granted not more than from 7 to 10 per cent of copies ordered, as in the case of the region of Riazan in 1954. The same is true of bibliographical tools for librarians: "Pursuit of the quantity of titles, in the circumstances of limited pulp resources, leads to the fact that bibliographical tools are issued in small circulations." Respecting pulp shortages, it is of interest to note that, in 1955, the Lenin Memorial Library discontinued publication of the bibliographical monthly, Knigi ... goda, (Books of the Year...), the Russian equivalent of the ALA Booklist and the U.S. Book Quarterly. Shortage of pulp was mentioned as one of the reasons.
While libraries, granted the opportunity of buying books from the Collectors, are somewhat dissatisfied due to the limitations imposed upon them by the Collectors' whims, they still regard this right to procure any material from this source as a special privilege. Libraries not afforded this opportunity "were not able to secure for their readers the needed books." For example, in 1951, a trade-union which had put aside the sum of 15,000 rubles for book purchase, "succeeded, in the course of nine months, in spending for books only 1,300 rubles." In other words, the book market supply was so meager that this trade-union was able to spend only 8.5 per cent of the budget earmarked for book purchase.

From 1917 to 1950, books by the four "classic" authors of Marxism-Leninism (Engels, Marx, Lenin, and Stalin) were issued in the Soviet Union in an aggregate of 889,000,000 copies. Of these, Stalin alone was accountable for almost two-thirds. In the first half of 1946, Stalin's share of these books reached 81.1 per cent whereas books by Lenin were apportioned but 4.2 per cent, and those by Friedrich Engels, .9 per cent. Karl Marx had almost disappeared from the Soviet book market. Only one item jointly undertaken by Marx and Engels, Communist Manifesto, was issued during the first six months of that year, while Stalin alone was represented by 443 titles. (Table III.)

Many libraries were sorely depleted by war destruction and rehabilitation has been slow. By 1948, the public (mass) libraries had regained hardly 70 per cent of their pre-war holdings. Likewise, school, kolkhoz, and trade-union library book resources had succeeded in reaching only from 9 to 15 per cent of their pre-war status. Party literature has gained top priority as a means of rehabilitating war-ravaged libraries. During the years 1946-1951 alone, the volume of Party literature to be found in public (mass libraries increased from 13,000,000 books to 34,000,000. There are some relatively small public libraries owning up to three hundred copies of a single political pamphlet. The extent to which such duplication is carried on is exemplified in the case of a Moscow library which reported in 1950: "The brief biography of Comrade Stalin is owned by this library in 360 copies." Other Party pamphlets were received by this library in the following quantities:

- 100-150 copies. . . . . . for circulation
- up to 10 copies. . . . . . for reading room
- up to 20 copies. . . . . . for deposit stations
- 1 copy . . . . . . for periodical reading room
- 1 copy . . . . . . for reference and bibliography

The need for the duplication of this literature is persistently underscored by the Ministry of Culture (the former Committee in Charge of Institutions for Cultural Enlightenment). A thorough study of the
presence of the "classics" of Marxism-Leninism in mass libraries is
under way. In 1951, when book holdings of the Iaroslav region were
checked against the standard catalog and its supplement, the Soviet
library journal was "shocked" to find that missing titles, in many
instances, had been available in all bookstores, but were not purchased
for the collections. Librarians in charge of these libraries were re-
primanded for their "negligence in staffing book resources." In 1952,
the methodological cabinet of Iaroslav Regional Library planned to
similarly evaluate district library holdings in the field of anti-religious
propaganda. 33

Book purchase limitations are keenly felt in fields other than
politics. A typical instance is that which existed in the children's
libraries of the Smolensk region where only 35.6 per cent of the 1953
book budget was spent. 34 The children's libraries of the Tula and
Riazan regions likewise succeeded in spending only 42 and 47 per cent
of their book budgets, respectively.

In order to discuss the statistics of Soviet library holdings,
one must also take into consideration the fact that the history of li-
brarianship in this nation is necessarily the story of a long line of
reoccurring purges. During the first decade of Soviet rule, libraries
throughout the Soviet Union suffered through these purges with book
losses of at least 60 per cent, 35 while in the early thirties book re-
sources were again reduced by 60 per cent. An attempt was made to
minimize the implications of these percentages by pointing out that as
much as from three to four years had elapsed since the 1926-1927
purge. A. Timofeev, who had pronounced this opinion, was much alarmed
to find that such a large percentage of the book resources of the early
thirties had to be considered subversive, because in effect, this meant
that "in libraries we kept, watched, and worked with such books as
should have been excluded long ago, since working with such books
means harming the readers." 36 Consequently, he upheld the decision
to exclude almost two-thirds of the existing library holdings.

Soviet libraries ran the "danger of losing many of their most
precious books." 37 However, active steps to curb the enormous de-
pletion of reading material available to the population were not taken
until March 3, 1933, when a decree was issued, explicitly prohibiting
any further book purges. 38 The discontinuance of this drive, however,
could not entirely solve the problem. Six months later, it was observed
that library basements still housed enormous quantities of unchecked,
unsorted and, thus, unused books. In Taganrog and likewise in Rostov-
on-Don as many as 500,000 volumes of this character had been assem-
bled. 39 In this case alone, an area not exceeding 100 square miles
had been deprived of about one million books.
Despite the 1933 decree, book purges continued throughout the thirties because of an interfactional struggle within the Communist Party, culminating in mass executions of "leftists," "rightists," and other groups deviating from the "general line." A major book purge was planned for 1941, but was never realized because German-Soviet hostilities had begun.

The first major library purge, during the postwar era, was initiated by A.A. Zhdanov in an attempt to "return to peacetime conditions." This campaign provided for an almost complete severance of cultural ties with other than Soviet countries. In the library field it started with the discovery of several subject headings deemed imical and reactionary. In their investigation of the Novosibirsk Regional Library, Party representatives uncovered in its catalog, such unorthodox subject headings as "philosophy of mind," "superman," and "tolstovstvo"—a school of lay philosophers building upon the moral teachings of Leo Tolstoi. Schopenhauer's works had been classified in this catalog as philosophical books while Zhdanov's speech pertaining to his opinion on philosophy had not been filed under philosophy. The Committee in Charge of Institutions for Cultural Enlightenment at the Cabinet of the Russian Federation, in Moscow, promptly reached the conclusion that this catalog "which should be, in the hands of librarians, a keen ideological weapon and a means for communist education, had turned into a channel for inimical, reactionary literature." Theoreticians of Soviet librarianship insisted that "technical problems of the classed catalog must be entirely subordinated to its ideological aim." Thus the Novosibirsk Regional Library found it imperative to exclude about 40 per cent of its titles from the public catalog. According to another author, during the first phase of the Novosibirsk book purge, a total of 105,000 catalog cards describing politically "bad" books were removed from the public catalog; during the second phase, an additional 55,000 cards were eliminated.

Many libraries followed the example set by the Gor'kii Regional Library which excluded 78 per cent of its titles from mass consumption thereby surpassing Novosibirsk in the thoroughness of its purge. In larger (regional and central) libraries, these books were relegated to a special MND ("massam ne davat"—do not give to masses) collection. Huge restricted-access collections became a characteristic feature of all sizable libraries of the Soviet Union. Banned literature was completely excluded from all district and rural library collections.

Current Soviet library literature conveys the impression that contemporary Russian librarians have to deal with many problems not encountered elsewhere. Also, while the statistics of Soviet book trade and library holdings present an impressive showing, closer scrutiny of these figures leads to the conclusion that these data are not to be accepted without qualification. For example, Russian book and library
Statistics may be taken at their face value only if one disregards
the practice currently accepted in other parts of the world of dis-
tinguishing books from pamphlets and ephemera. It also appears
that the actual quantity of books published in contemporary Russia
is considerably less than the output of some of her European neigh-
bors. As goes the book industry, so go library holdings for current
acquisitions which to a large extent are dependent upon the printed
matter produced by the local book trade. Thus the number of new
titles which can be added each year to libraries is necessarily greatly
circumscribed.

The Soviet standards for library statistics are no reflection
of a wartime thinking. The committee which authored these statistical
methods was established in peacetime, before the start of German-
Soviet hostilities, and these methods were not exemplified in concrete
measures until after the war. As has been shown these methods likely
are used even today, since post-1946 library literature does not pro-
vide any indications to the contrary. It is of interest to note that the
data which can be deduced from the Soviet national bibliography of the
late forties coincide, in general, very closely with the prewar picture
in the field. Soviet sources bring out that, as early as 1935, pam-
phlets of less than 33 pages were responsible for 49 per cent of all
Soviet publications. According to the same sources, a decade later
this percentage amounted to 50.5 (Table I.) On one hand this meant
a small increase of the relative importance of ephemera among the
Soviet publications. On the other, this implies that the postwar data
were no accidental phenomena. After all, inclusion of ephemera in the
Russian national bibliography goes back as far as the very beginning
of Knizhnaia letopis' in 1907.

Whether these conclusions are still valid today, in 1955, is one
of the problems which could be suggested for further inquiry. In any
case, it will, however, be quite a while before we will be able to study
the data pertaining to the Knizhnaia letopis' of the mid-fifties because
of the reasons pointed out by Ralph Shaw in 1946. Even the Soviet
analysis of these figures trail the events at a rate of seven to eight years.
The 1946 data on Soviet book production were not evaluated by the Rus-
sian library journal until 1954.

Previous deductions on the nature of Soviet library holdings
and the publishing industry should be revised in the light of the above
facts and observations. This, on its part, would contribute to a more
realistic understanding of the manner in which the contemporary Russian
library affects the library patron, particularly the so-called general
reader. It should be noted that according to information from Russian
library periodicals Russian librarians themselves are apparently be-
coming more and more aware of these problems.
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*Knizhnaia letopis' XL, issue 25 (June, 1946). Issue 25 is selected because it is one of the most recent issues of the Soviet national bibliography, reprinted by the American Council of Learned Societies and thus easily available. Due to restrictions imposed by Soviet authorities upon the export of bibliographical tools, after World War II Knizhnaia letopis' is practically inaccessible outside Russia; see Ralph R. Shaw, "About Russian Publications," Library Journal, 71:1029, August 1946.
TABLE II

Number of pages of all books listed by class in an issue of Knizhnaia letopis'.

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<th>III Communist Party</th>
<th>IV Communist Youth Organization</th>
<th>V Philosophy</th>
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Issue 25, June, 1946.
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<th>XXVII</th>
<th>XXVIII</th>
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<td>Art (3 entries)</td>
<td>Linguistics (2 entries)</td>
<td>Science of Letters Belles-Lettres (35 entries)</td>
<td>Children's Literature (13 entries)</td>
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<td>Book trade, Librarian-ship, Bibliography (4 entries)</td>
<td>Reference books, Encyclopedias (No entries)</td>
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<td>15</td>
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TABLE III

Distribution of Titles by Authors in Class I ("Marxism-Leninism") of the Soviet National Bibliography from January to June, 1946*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUTHORS</th>
<th>Stalin</th>
<th>Lenin and Stalin</th>
<th>Lenin</th>
<th>Marx</th>
<th>Marx and Engels</th>
<th>Engels</th>
<th>Books on Stalin, Lenin, Marx and Engels by other authors</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Titles</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Titles</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Issues 1-25 of Knizhnaia letopis¹, 1946.
FOOTNOTES

1. Entries 7654, 7677-80, 7686, 7706, 7710-12, 7714-17, Knizhnaia letopis', Vol. 40, no. 21, May 1946.


8. Razovyi tirazh -- in the case of periodicals, the average number of copies printed weekly (for weeklies), fortnightly (for bi-weeklies), or monthly (for monthlies) during a certain period, usually one year.


10. Ibid., p. 15.

11. Ibid., p. 19.


16. Kolkhoz, abbreviation for kollektivnoe khoziaistvo (collective farm). A kolkhoz now consists of several villages. After the mandatory collectivization of farming, the former peasants became kolkhozniks, that is, kolkhoz hands.


27. Ibid., p. 5.


36. Ibid.

37. "Postanovlenie Kollegii Narkompresa RSFSR o prosmotre knizhnogo sostava bibliotek" [Decision of the Board of the People's Commissariat for Education in the Russian Federation on the Revision of Library Book Resources], ibid., no. 8-9, 1932, pp. 6-7.


45. Ambartsumian, op. cit., p. 6.


47. See footnote to Table I.

48. Denis'ev, op. cit.

* * * * *

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