The Public Libraries in East Berlin

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In order to better understand the present-day trends in the development of the public library system in Berlin (capital city of the German Democratic Republic), a brief statistical review of the situation before World War II is necessary. In 1938, approximately 4.3 million people lived in the twenty municipalities of Metropolitan Berlin, which occupied 884 square kilometers (218,327 acres) of land. There were 114 public libraries with a stock of almost 900,000 volumes. The large and learned libraries like the Prussian State Library and the University Library were generally used by members of the intelligentsia only, and there was no cooperation with the public libraries. The link between the Berliner Stadtbibliothek, a learned library with a stock of 330,000 volumes, and the public libraries was relatively loose and practically limited to interloan services. In the eight municipalities making up today's capital of the German Democratic Republic, there were forty-one public libraries with 302,000 volumes in 1938 which served 31,300 readers during that year (2 per cent of the 1.6 million inhabitants); a total of 674,300 volumes were taken out by those readers.

Immediately after the war, reconstruction of libraries commenced, with the result that in East Berlin thirty public libraries had a stock of 125,500 volumes by December 1945, and 13,500 persons could be counted as steady readers. Administrative authorities of the library system paid much attention to the training of new librarians. The Berlin Library School was reopened shortly after the war. The detailed steps leading to the present situation are not relevant here, just as problems in library work with general literature and fiction need not be considered. However, a study of statistics is necessary in order to clarify the changed situation in the supply of books through the libraries.

East Berlin occupies an area of 403 square kilometers (99,581

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acres) and has a population of approximately 1.06 million. While before the war the population increased steadily, it has remained practically level since 1946 because of the decimation of the younger generation during the war. This fact is important, since today's problems in supplying the inhabitants with books through libraries do not arise from an increasing population but from a qualitatively and quantitatively fast-growing need for reading. The people's increasing demands on libraries are, above all, a result of planned economic development in the German Democratic Republic, where a continuous increase in production efficiency is required and an increase of scientific-technical knowledge among the working class is necessary, thus creating new needs for technical and scientific literature.

At the present time, 125 general public libraries have 800,000 volumes at their disposal. In 1963 they were visited by 133,000 readers who took out 3.3 million books. These figures represent a 100 per cent increase over the last ten years. In relation to total population, the number of readers (12.5 per cent) represents a sixfold increase over 1938. In addition, most nationally owned industrial plants have established libraries, serving employees with fiction and non-fiction literature, as well as with professional reading. There are 275 of these libraries, with 668,000 volumes, and 75,000 readers who took out 1.1 million books in 1963. The strength of the factory libraries varies. Only seventy-six had a full-time librarian in 1963; these libraries made available about 450,000 volumes to 51,300 permanent readers who took out 836,000 books.

If one takes into consideration the other "allgemeinbildende" libraries, such as institutional libraries (in hospitals, old age homes, etc.) 20 per cent of the total population in East Berlin can be said to frequent libraries—a number ten times greater than that before World War II. To this about 500 scientific and professional libraries must be added, since now they admit the general public and contribute more and more to the provision of educational literature. Altogether there are more than 15 million volumes in the scientific and public "allgemeinbildende" libraries of East Berlin. Approximately 32 per cent of the population are users of these libraries.

While the number of libraries might be sufficient, their accommodation, equipment, and personnel do not satisfy the growing demands. Lack of staff makes the work most demanding, and staff positions can be filled only with great difficulty. The growing demand by readers for literature in technology and science also creates problems in the
work of the public libraries. The key to these problems, it is believed, is to be found in close cooperation between the public libraries and the scientific libraries.

In East Berlin, public libraries are under the administration of each separate municipality; however, they are, together with the Central Stadtbibliothek under the jurisdiction of the Cultural Department of the Municipal Council of Greater Berlin. Such cooperation has led to thorough knowledge and respect of each others' specific working methods. With its extensive scientific material and skilled staff, the Stadtbibliothek is able to offer more and more assistance to the public libraries. At present the Stadtbibliothek has a stock of 820,000 volumes and circulates 250,000 volumes of a scientific nature annually. (This does not include volumes used in the Reference Departments, and works of fiction are loaned only for scientific and professional purposes.)

Years ago the Stadtbibliothek catered mainly to the arts, but now literature which directly serves industrial production takes up a more important place. In 1949, one year after the division of Berlin, 15 per cent of the books circulated dealt with technical subjects, natural science, and mathematics. In 1963, these subjects amounted to 42 per cent of the circulation. It is also interesting to note that the percentage of adolescent readers is increasing steadily. Today, approximately 60 per cent of the readers are young people in training or continuing their education. With its rich collections and well-selected additions to the scientific book and periodical holdings, and with judicious duplication in view of the needs of the public libraries, the Stadtbibliothek is in a position to help the public libraries. A regional interloan service was established in 1950. Since then, every reader registered at a public library has available to him, under certain conditions, the scientific material of the Stadtbibliothek.

In 1959, a special information bureau for technical and scientific literature was established, with the particular task of bringing about close cooperation with the libraries in East Berlin's factories. At the same time the regional interloan service of the Stadtbibliothek was extended to a greater number of Berlin industrial plants. Thus, the working people are able today to obtain literature which is not available from their factory library; the literature requested will be sent to the plant on short notice. The bureau's work with the plants is not restricted to this more or less passive phase; it has also helped solve production problems which became known to it. The use of "initiative
information” is gaining increasing importance. “Initiative information” consists of bulletins on new acquisitions which may be of service in special projects. Although this activity is relatively time consuming, due to its individual nature, it is extremely effective. Experience shows that 75 per cent of the information sent out results in requests for the respective literature. The bureau operates the well-equipped photocopying department of the Stadtbibliothek.

In 1954 central libraries were established in all administrative districts in East Germany in order to improve the library system as a whole. Berlin was not involved in this. Rather, the functions of the Stadtbibliothek were extended through creation of a Department for Public Libraries. Since then, this Department aids the responsible municipal branches and guides the public libraries in East Berlin. The Department is mainly responsible for maintaining uniformity and rationalization of working methods and for further education of library employees. An additional task is the writing and editing of informational materials, e.g., recommending bibliographies, preparing guides for literary events and exhibitions, etc. The Department analyzes and evaluates the results of the work done in all “allgemeinbildende” libraries. It cooperates with the Central Institute for Librarianship, the latter being responsible for guidance of all public libraries throughout the German Democratic Republic. Through the work of the Central Institute it became possible to create a uniform cataloging system in all public libraries. The Central Institute carries on research studies, advises on building up book stock, and publishes promotional literature and the professional periodical Der Bibliothekar. For further training of librarians, a professional school was established, which offers every librarian the possibility of attending a three week course every year; much attention is paid in such courses to the literature in the fields of technology and the natural sciences.

The future work of the Berliner Stadtbibliothek will be of considerable importance for the development of East Berlin’s public libraries. At present, the maximum capacity of its building has nearly been reached. A new modern building is under construction which will be equipped with technical improvements. It is planned to make the new building serve the functions of a general research library, a central library for East Berlin’s public libraries, and versatile cultural center. However, support for the public libraries can not remain the task of the Stadtbibliothek only. In order to improve the regional supply of literature, other scientific public and trade libraries in East Berlin
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will have to make their contribution. After all, the increased needs for literature—a result of the technical revolution of our days—is a symptom of the growth of scientific knowledge; it is estimated that man's knowledge will double in less than ten years, which calls for cooperation and specialization. It can therefore only be handled in the long run by highly developed technical equipment. Similarly, the heavy increase in population will also be felt by libraries in the next years to come. This again will require further automation of working methods.

The Berlin group of the recently founded German Library Association, to which all types of library systems belong, expects to make studies of all these problems. Some of the tasks deal with the precise coordination of holdings and bibliographic information services, as well as the incorporation of collections from different libraries in the regional interloan service. This cooperation among librarians of different types of libraries will contribute to prepare the formation of a uniform library system.

The present problems in the library system of East Berlin, unlike those of other capitals in the world, are not due to unusual growth of population but are rather a result of a quantitative as well as a qualitative increase in the need for reading materials. To overcome this difficulty, cooperation and specialization has begun which, as between the Stadtbibliothek and the "allgemeinbildende" libraries, is already well-developed. The same types and methods of cooperation will be continued and other public and professional libraries will be included.

References

1. In this article, the term "allgemeinbildende Bibliotheken" (public libraries) includes public as well as non-public libraries of general educational character. In contrast to the former which admit everyone, the latter are available to a restricted group of persons only, e.g. libraries of factories, schools, hospitals, etc. (Issue Editor's note.)


4. The term "Volksbüchereien" (popular libraries) has been changed to "Allgemeine öffentliche Bibliotheken" (general public libraries), as the task and character of these libraries have changed considerably since 1945. Today they serve
to an increasing extent for the raising of the general education level and for both professional training and continued professional education.


6. They are called "Gewerkschaftsbibliotheken" (libraries of the trade unions), as they are used by members of the factories.

