

Soviet Centralized Bibliography:

ITS STRENGTH AND WEAKNESSES

After pointing to the critical need for comprehensive world bibliography both current and retrospective, the author describes the structure of Soviet bibliographic coverage. He gives reasons for certain aspects of Soviet bibliography which have on occasion in the past been criticized and describes some of the particular problems encountered in enumerating the productions of the Soviet press. He concludes with a statement concerning some of the weaknesses remaining in the Soviet system and describes prospects for their elimination.

THE PROBLEM of centralized bibliography is of urgent importance for our times. In the opinion of UNESCO, the two main objectives of the world's bibliographic effort are to maintain a comprehensive record of current published materials of all kinds, and to try to create a comprehensive record of past production. Each is a very difficult task, and it will become more difficult in the future if we do not make it part of our work at the present time.

If my memory is correct, I recall a quotation in an American library journal made by Verner Clapp, or was it Jesse Shera, who said that we are living in an age of explosions, an explosion of population, explosion of science, explosion of information, and an explosion of book publishing. The world's publication output has been doubling every forty-five years during the five centuries since Gutenberg labored—or at a rate roughly three times as fast as the growth of the world's population.

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The tremendous explosion in research has generated a million or more scientific papers a year. How formidable is the task of ensuring current awareness of all this new information! In the Soviet Union, from 1918 to 1964, more than 1,900,000 books were published in 138 languages, of which eighty-nine are in the USSR. Each year there is an average of 556 new books for every one hundred citizens in the USSR, whereas in 1913, before the Revolution, there were only sixty-two for every one hundred people.

To cover adequately the entire national output of printed matter with the greatest possible ease and competence, and to cope with the task of coordinating the efforts of large bodies of bibliographic workers engaged in this work, incontrovertibly requires the support of the state.

In the Soviet Union today bibliography is regarded as a matter of greatest national importance. One of the strongest points in favor of the Soviet system of centralized national bibliography is the fact that this endeavor is being developed under extremely favorable conditions, namely, that of a centrally planned and balanced economy and culture, with book publishing and

distribution under the direction and regulation of the state.

In most countries of the world the task of compiling the national bibliography is the responsibility of a national or diet library. In my opinion, however, it is better to place such a large-scale undertaking in the hands of a special institution. Experience has proven that many national libraries are overloaded with a variety of specific library activities, with the result that national bibliography is often left to drift in a sea of cross currents.

The difficult and complex task of creating, developing, and maintaining a national bibliography is the responsibility of an institution specially established for this purpose. For this reason the All-Union Book Chamber (Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata) was created by government decree. It receives under the legal depository act a copy of all materials published in the USSR, compiles and issues the current national bibliography, initiates and directs work in the field of retrospective bibliography, and also serves as a center of methodological guidance and assistance to other libraries doing research in bibliography.

Conceived in the period of Tsarist Russia, the Soviet national bibliography during a half century of drastically changing political and social conditions has undergone many changes in format, system, and frequency of issuance. Today, the current weekly bibliography *Knizhnaia letopis'* is the most comprehensive index and guide throughout the world of the Soviet book. Published in two separate or parallel series, the main issue of the *Knizhnaia letopis'* records the current production of all Soviet book publishing houses, all scientific monographs, textbooks, handbooks, popular booklets, reference literature, fiction, dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc.

Serial publications, learned papers, or transactions are listed in the *Knizhnaia*

letopis' and the yearbook (*Ezhegodnik knig SSSR*) only by title; the analytical description of these periodicals will be found in the *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR* (Chronicle of periodical publications of the USSR).

The parallel of supplementary issue of the *Knizhnaia letopis'*,—*dopolnitel'nyi vypusk*—lists most all the printed or processed information intended primarily for internal use by various administrative, social, economic, or scientific organizations. It includes such items as official documents and instructions, advertising materials, methodical publications, standards, abstracts of theses, etc. Publications in these categories are usually unpriced and for limited distribution through official channels.

In my opinion, a separate listing of such official or instructive material of limited distribution is quite sound. It prevents the already expanding *Knizhnaia letopis'* from being overloaded with thousands of items of limited interest and use for the general public.

However, even this well-founded purpose in the method of publishing the Soviet national bibliography did not often receive the correct interpretation and evaluation abroad. Some members of the distinguished delegation of American librarians who visited the All-Union Book Chamber in 1961, and who had an opportunity to make a first-hand study of its activities, criticized the practice of issuing the Soviet bibliography in two parts. They felt that the comprehensiveness of coverage of the national bibliography was seriously jeopardized by this practice, alluding to a kind of Soviet restrictive policy which attempts to hide from the rest of the world some important information. Such naive reasoning! It is no secret that a great deal of printed material classified "strictly confidential" is being issued throughout the world, not only in the USSR but in the United States as well, and that such

political, strategic, or scientific materials is accessible to limited official circles only.

[By the way, the new American Depository Library Act excludes from distribution even among depository libraries those publications which are determined by their issuing bodies to be for official use only, or intended for strictly administrative or operational purposes of no public interest or educational value. Thus, no one will blame L. Quincy Mumford, the Librarian of Congress, or Sir Frank Francis of the British Museum, that such material is not listed in the national bibliographies of their countries.]

By slightly digressing from my main topic I have intended to remove some of the groundless critical remarks which in my opinion are directed against some of the imaginary shortcomings of Soviet bibliography.

In evaluating the significance of such a large-scale enterprise as the Soviet national bibliography, the determinant factors should be:

1. comprehensiveness of the bibliography, its coverage of the national output of the national output of publications.

2. regularity and up-to-date information about new publications.

3. range and definition of bibliographic data about each registered publication, and, of course, the use of the bibliography as a satisfactory reference and information tool.

In terms of coverage, the *Knizhnaia letopis'* is a unique, and I dare say, an unsurpassed phenomenon in the world of bibliography. It covers almost 90 per cent of all publications classified as books or brochures, and all monographs of five pages or more. Only a few types of publications are excluded, e.g. items issued in less than one hundred copies (except for important political, scientific, or literary works), and various unessen-

tial material considered to be ephemeral.

Such comprehensiveness of coverage is only possible by means of the compulsory legal deposit of all new Soviet publications at the All-Union Book Chamber. The organization receives an advance copy directly from the printer before the publication appears in print. This assures an up-to-dateness in the current national bibliography, and enables the printed catalog card services of the Book Chamber to provide libraries with cards several days before the book is marketed.

Of course even a well planned system of compulsory legal deposit and the Book Chamber's current bibliography sometimes run into problems. On the whole, the editing machinery of the national bibliography is running smoothly and efficiently. Errors, omissions, or other defects are promptly eliminated or remedied. For example, in each issue of the *Knizhnaia letopis'* there is a section which lists publications received by the Book Chamber with a delay of two years or more. In the first weekly issue of the current year with 849 entries, there were only four delayed entries, two for 1961 and two for 1963.

Full descriptive cataloging is given in the *Knizhnaia letopis'*, plus the size of the edition, price, book cover, and the language of the edition. The Book Chamber's registration number, as well as the Decimal Classification index number are given. The weekly *Knizhnaia letopis'* is indexed quarterly by author, editor, illustrator of subjects, and geographical areas. There is also an annual index which lists monographic series and the separate titles within each series.

Besides the *Knizhnaia letopis'*, there is an All-Union bibliographic record of music, maps, pictorial reproductions, serials, reviews, etc., and these appear regularly in constantly increasing volume. The chronicle of journal articles, *Letopis' zhurnal'nykh statei*, is a com-

plete index published weekly since 1926 and lists articles, documents, and literary pieces appearing in the principal Soviet periodicals. There is also a monthly chronicle of newspaper articles, *Letopis' gazetnykh statei*, which lists articles appearing in the principal Soviet newspapers.

When one realizes the enormous amount of work that goes into the preparation of the journal and newspaper chronicles, he can appreciate more fully their value as excellent bibliographies. For example, in 1964 there were 155,000 journal articles and 32,500 newspaper articles listed in the respective bibliographies. Of course it would be too burdensome and unwieldy a task to cover all the vast amount of newspaper articles, paragraphs, and notices which appear in the seven thousand Soviet daily and weekly newspapers. Therefore, a rigid selective policy for bibliographic entries is an absolute necessity. However, the number of listed newspaper entries is growing faster each year. According to a recent statement of the director of the Book Chamber, the number has tripled in size in the last five years.

I should also mention that, although the *Knizhnaia letopis'* lists all the national or I should say the multinational output of Soviet publications, regardless of the language in which they are published, the chronicles of journal and newspaper articles lists only articles printed in Russian. The listing of articles in other national languages is the responsibility of the Book Chambers of the Soviet Republics, or in some cases their national libraries.

The American librarians who visited the USSR in 1961 were puzzled by the fact that each of the fifteen Soviet republics, and even each of the twenty-eight autonomous republics and autonomous districts has more or less developed its own current national bibliography. "Thus the Soviet Union has more than a national bibliography" the delegation de-

clared in its report. "It has a supranational bibliography, plus 17 [actually 15] national bibliographies, which heavily duplicate the titles appearing in the All-Union bibliography." As a striking example of such duplication, and the waste of effort and money, the delegation cited the Uzbek Republic where 80 per cent of the entries in the Uzbek *Knizhnaia letopis'* also appear in the All-Union *Knizhnaia letopis'*, and this 80 per cent includes all scientific and scholarly publications in Uzbekistan. The data here cited are quite correct, but the conclusions are not.

Foreign visitors to the Soviet Union very often have a misunderstanding of the essence of Soviet federalism. The Constitution of 1936 says that "the USSR is a federal state, formed on the basis of a voluntary union of equal soviet socialist republics." The sovereignty of these republics lies in the peculiar autonomy in cultural affairs. The Soviet Union is not a melting pot of nationalities like the United States is said to be, and a soviet republic is quite unlike an American state. Each of the soviet republics has its national languages, maintains its national culture, historical traditions, customs, and literature. The flourishing of some of these national cultures began only during the Soviet period, and their national languages became written languages only after the October Revolution.

However, the roots of their culture reach into antiquity. The Armenians for example contributed greatly to the development of science and civilization in the middle ages. The great Uzbek astronomer Uglubek and the physician Avicena are world-renowned. As a matter of fact, the first printed book in the Soviet Union was not published in Moscow, but in Vilnius, the ancient capital of Lithuania, by the Byelorussian scientist and editor Skorina.

At present there is a great deal of publishing in the national languages of

the various republics. In Lithuania, where I come from, there were 1,494 books published in 1963, of which 917 were in Lithuanian and the other 577 in Russian, Polish, or other languages spoken in Lithuania. Of course the Lithuanians like other nationalities of the USSR are vitally interested in issuing publications in Russian in order to make their scientific and literary works known throughout the Soviet Union, and thus throughout the world.

While there is a considerable number of books published in Russian in the various soviet republics, the bulk of the output of the republic publishing houses is in the native language. This then is the *raison d'être* of the Book Chambers in the various republics. And, like the All-Union Book Chamber in Moscow, the functions and activities of each republic Chamber are similar. As national bibliographical information centers, they receive all the publications of the respective republic under the compulsory legal deposit system. This law not only enables the republic Book Chamber to create its own current bibliographies, but at the same time permits it to stock the most complete collection of national literature. Unlike the All-Union Book Chamber, however, all entries in the local bibliographies are done in the original languages, and are not translated into Russian, thereby stressing the national character of these bibliographies.

Close cooperation between the Book Chambers and the republic national libraries is essential in carrying out the formidable task of compiling and issuing the national (All-Union) bibliography. Without this cooperation the republic Book Chambers would be swamped with the editing of current bibliographies, and would not be able to venture into many other bibliographic projects.

For example, were the All-Union Book Chamber to cope with the task of compiling such cumulative bibliographies as the "Book Annual of the USSR" or the

"Chronicle of Periodicals of the USSR" without the cooperation of the Republic Book Chambers, then the assistance and combined forces of some of the larger libraries would be needed. On the other hand, close cooperation between the Book Chambers and the larger libraries is markedly evident in the field of retrospective bibliography. In Georgia, for example, more than three hundred years of its publications have been covered in a comprehensive bibliography created with the combined efforts of the Republic Book Chamber and the academy, national, and university libraries.

Also worth mentioning is the project of compiling a retrospective bibliography of Lithuania. This bibliography must cover the entire pre-Soviet period, beginning with the first half of the sixteenth century up to 1940. It will cover not only books, but all other kinds of printed matter, periodicals, and periodical articles. A bibliography comprising twenty-four volumes and fifteen thousand pages, it will be created by a pool of the largest libraries in Lithuania together with scientific institutions under the direction and guidance of the Republic Book Chamber, and an editorial board consisting of the best experts in their field. Each library participating in this project was entrusted with a specific task in accordance with the character of its holdings and the functions and activities of the respective library.

Some progress has been made in the field of retrospective bibliography of the Russian (pre-Soviet) book. The All-Union Book Chamber, which is involved in a great number of projects covering the Soviet period, such as the compilation of the *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdaniï* (Chronicle of Periodicals of the USSR), with its supposed fifteen or even twenty million entries, is not able to devote its efforts to such a monumental bibliographic project. This tremendous task has therefore been undertaken by the large Lenin State Library in Moscow

and the Saltykov-Shchedrin Library in Leningrad with their comprehensive holdings of the Russian book. Already the first two volumes of the five-volume set for the period 1725-1800 have been published.

In discussing centralized bibliography, the distribution of printed catalog cards based on the entries compiled for the bibliography is also of special consideration. In the USSR this operation is the responsibility of the All-Union Book Chamber for Russian books and the republic Book Chambers for publications in their respective languages.

Cards are also issued for articles in journals and newspapers, and, in addition, the Book Chamber issues separate series of annotated cards for some of the smaller public libraries. Cataloging-in-source still remains an experiment. The best advance in this direction has been made by the Ukrainian Republic. They receive the galley proofs from the publishing houses and send the card copy back to the publishing house together with the galley. However, because of the fact that the books are issued by the publishing houses and the printed cards by the Book Chambers, stoppages and gaps occur since the printed card is often behind the book.

Thus far we have discussed the highlights of Soviet centralized bibliography, and next to nothing about the shortcomings. We are aware of the many gaps that remain to be filled in the field of bibliography, particularly those relating to periodicals and to the cumulation of periodical indexes. In the field of retrospective bibliography, there is a serious gap in

the nineteenth century period, and there remains a mosaic of various blank spaces. There are still complaints of insufficient promptness in editing the current bibliography and in the distribution of printed cards.

In the Asian republics, where the native bibliographers are young and inexperienced, the quality of current and retrospective bibliography is often poor. The technique of editing the current bibliography is in the manufacturing, but not the highly mechanized, stage of development. The Book Chambers are very conservative in this respect. Mechanization and automation in the Book Chambers have still not been introduced. This may provide a solution to many of our problems.

One of the best rewards for the efforts of a nation in developing culture and science is the interest and enthusiasm shown by other nations in these achievements. We view with great satisfaction the growing interest abroad in the use of the Soviet national bibliography. To illustrate, I call your attention to the fact that an American firm has undertaken the task of reprinting the *Knizhnaia letopis'* for the years 1907 to 1954—a publishing enterprise of tremendous magnitude. To be issued in 156 volumes, at a price of over \$5,000, the decision to reprint came as the result of a number of requests from librarians all over the country. In conclusion therefore, I pay tribute to this grand endeavor, by quoting a line from an American TV commercial: "Try it, buy it, you will enjoy it."

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