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### USA – Russia Library Materials Exchanges: Past, Present and Future

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#### *INTRODUCTION*

Research materials exchanges between US and Russian libraries have a long, productive and mutually beneficial history. Throughout their existence these exchanges have been affected by political situations, economic conditions and developments in science and technology. This paper attempts to give a brief overview of the history of exchanges, assess current conditions, and make very subjective projections concerning future developments in exchange programs between US and Russian Libraries.

#### *HISTORY*

It is somewhat difficult for someone not involved in building Slavic Collections in the West to understand current conditions without some knowledge of the history of exchanges. Thus we will make a brief journey into the past.

Exchanges of research materials between American and Russian libraries played an important role in cultural relations between the two countries. This role became even more significant after the Russian Revolution of 1917, when the Soviet Government began to use exchanges not only as a means of obtaining materials from the West during the turbulent post-revolutionary times, but also as channels for distribution of propaganda or, in its own words, “truthful” information about the Soviet Union. Exchanges were also part of an effort to break out of the isolation in which the new Soviet State found itself after World War I and the Revolution, and to win recognition from Western countries.

Soviet cultural missions operated in the United States long before formal diplomatic relations were established in 1932, and conducting book exchanges was one of their tasks. The Soviet government also

used book exchanges as a convenient method of obtaining scientific and technical information as well as western publications and general information on the world communist movement without spending hard currency, a shortage of which the Soviets experienced as early as 1922.

The United States pioneered in promoting exchanges of research materials and government documents between the two nations. Some Ivy League colleges established exchanges of materials with Imperial Russia in the early 1800s. Harvard University, for example, started exchanges even before the American Civil War. In June of 1921 the University of Illinois Library sent a letter directly to Lenin proposing an exchange of Soviet government publications for University of Illinois publications.<sup>1</sup> This letter seems to have made him realize that here was a much-needed opportunity to obtain western scientific publications without spending hard currency or gold. A special terminology even made its appearance in Soviet professional library literature in the thirties – *bezvaliutnoe snabzhenie bibliotek inostrannoi literaturoi*,<sup>2</sup> literally, “non-hard-currency provision of libraries with foreign literature”- meaning, foreign materials libraries could obtain without paying hard currency.

Control over sources of information, however, was so important to the Bolsheviks that nine short months after the Revolution, in the midst of a collapsed economy, poverty and war, a conference on the centralization of the library system and an introduction to the Swiss-American system was held in Moscow in July of 1918.<sup>3</sup> Among the topics discussed was the issue of book exchanges. Lenin himself sent out the invitations to the conference. They were rather an order than an invitation, and ended with the words: “Non-fulfilment of this instruction will entail grave revolutionary penalties.”<sup>4</sup> On one hand the Soviet government promoted the exchange of literature; on the other it established rigid control over book exchanges that continued during the entire Soviet period with various levels of severity.

Before the beginning of the nineteen sixties there were relatively few Slavic collections in the United States. The launching of the man-made satellite Sputnik into space by the Soviets in October of 1957, changes in the political situation after Stalin’s death and the 20th Communist Party Congress prompted ample public interest in the United States and instigated a mini-explosion in Soviet studies. New Russian and Soviet study programs were established at many universities and the few already existing Slavic centers got a second wind. This is when the majority of American universities started to build their Slavic collections.

That was not an easy task. Strict censorship and control over production and distribution of information in the Soviet Union had a profound effect on the ability of American libraries to build their Slavic collections. Libraries outside of the Soviet borders could obtain materials published in the Soviet Union—and only those titles approved for distribution abroad—solely from a book export agency called *Mezhkniga* (International Book), or from western vendors who also had to buy publications from this same Soviet agency. Western libraries used exchanges for obtaining Soviet materials not available through government-controlled channels.

The exchanges were mutually beneficial for American and Soviet libraries. Ironically censorship and draconian control over the production of printed matter had its positive side. The Soviets had probably the most comprehensive bibliographies in the world, produced by the Soviet Book Chamber, the national centre for bibliographic control. Thus Western librarians knew what was published in the Soviet Union, ordered the materials they wanted from vendors, and what they could not get from dealers, they requested from exchange partners.

During the Soviet period many Soviet libraries received several copies of newly published titles free of charge. A portion of these deposits was used for international book exchanges. Therefore Soviet libraries did not have to have special allocations for acquisitions of materials for exchange partners or hard currency for building collections of foreign publications.

## ***STATE OF EXCHANGES DURING THE SOVIET PERIOD***

Slavic exchanges were discussed in depth at *The Second International Conference of Slavic Librarians and Information Specialists* held in Washington DC in 1985. In preparation for today's session, I reread papers published in the conference proceedings devoted to exchanges. I was struck by the vitality of the exchange programs at various universities and by the enthusiasm of American librarians regarding their relations with Soviet libraries. Back then I conducted an assessment of exchanges for that conference. In 1984 a questionnaire was distributed to sixty Slavic collections in the United States. Thirty-four libraries representing 56.6% had responded. The following motives were listed as reasons for establishing exchanges:

Obtaining of materials not commercially available, such as:

- Local / provincial / regional publications
- Small run publications
- Limited editions
- Conference proceedings
- Government and other official publications
- Materials not intended for distribution in the West

Microfilming services

- Of antiquarian materials
- Back issues of out-of-print serials
- Long runs of antiquarian serials

Receiving serials / periodicals in the original

- Out-of-print serials
- Back runs of serials
- Current serials

Saving money

- Exchanges were viewed by some as a less expensive way of obtaining Soviet publications, antiquarian books and serials

Bibliographic services provided by the Soviet Libraries

Cultural exchanges – library and scholarly contacts.

In 1984 64% of US libraries with Slavic collections had exchange programs with Russian libraries. A quarter of these libraries received between 10 and 35% of their total current monographic acquisitions from exchange partners in the USSR; one-fifth of the libraries received between 40 and 50 percent; one-sixth – 1 to 5 percent and one library acquired 100% of current monographs from exchange partners. The majority of the libraries reported a high level of satisfaction with this method of acquisitions.

### Percentage of the Total Monographs Received by US Libraries through Exchanges in 1984

<b>% of US Libraries</b>	<b>% of Total Acquisitions</b>
<b>25%</b>	<b>10% - 35%</b>
<b>20%</b>	<b>40%-50%</b>
<b>17%</b>	<b>1%-5%</b>
<b>2%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>36%</b>	<b>None</b>

More than half (65%) of the US libraries obtained current Soviet serials through exchanges. The extent of obtaining current serials acquisitions through exchanges among these libraries varied greatly, ranging from 5 to 80%. The satisfaction level was also high.

### Percentage of the Total Serials Received by US Libraries through Exchanges in 1984

<b>% of US Libraries</b>	<b>% of Total Acquisitions</b>
<b>65%</b>	<b>5%-80%</b>
<b>35%</b>	<b>None</b>

### *CURRENT STATE OF EXCHANGES*

Sixteen years later, in 2001, a slightly modified questionnaire was distributed to a much wider group of Slavic librarians. A considerably smaller number of libraries responded – 7 American and 2 British. In addition some librarians sent only short summaries regarding their declining or discontinued exchange activities. According to the 2001 survey results the following picture emerged.

### Percentage of the Total of Publications Received from Exchange Partners

<b>Slavic collections at:</b>	<b>1984</b>	<b>2001</b>
<b>Stanford</b>	<b>Most of titles</b>	<b>20%-30%</b>
<b>Cornell</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Only some</b>
<b>Harvard</b>	<b>32%-35%</b>	<b>None</b>

- The general tendency is toward curtailing the exchange programs in the United States.
- It seems the exchanges have survived and are still productive primarily at large libraries with a staff of Exchange Librarians or where Gifts and Exchanges departments handle them.
- The majority of the largest and most comprehensive US Slavic collections have scaled down exchange programs. For example, both Cornell and Stanford reported a reversal in the proportion of materials acquired from vendors and exchange partners. Stanford used to receive most of its Slavic materials from exchange partners; now they get only 20% to 30%. In 1984 Cornell's main source of Russian and East European acquisitions was exchanges; Western dealers were used only as a supplementary source.<sup>5</sup> In 2001 the reverse is true: the primary sources of acquisitions are approval plans and blanket orders with western vendors, while small- scale exchanges serve as a supplementary source.
- Some of the largest Slavic collections have discontinued exchanges. Harvard, for example, reported in 1984 getting 35% of monographs and 32% of serial titles through exchanges.<sup>6</sup> Presently Harvard has no exchange programs.
- A few libraries receive about half of their materials from vendors and the other half from exchange partners.
- Only one library reported a slight increase in exchange activity.<sup>7</sup>

### ***REASONS FOR DECLINE***

No doubt, the exchange programs are in a considerable decline. The question is, why?

- Ironically, the vanishing of censorship and government control caused the initial decline. Exchanges ceased to be the only source for obtaining materials not available through Soviet export agencies.
- In effect, exchange partners became simply vendors and as such had to compete in a free market economy with professional vendors while suffering great disadvantages.
- The number of free books received by Russian libraries in the Soviet era has either decreased considerably under present conditions or become unavailable, for various reasons. Therefore Russian libraries could offer noticeably fewer titles for exchange and had to purchase materials in order to satisfy their exchange partners' requests.
- However, as a result of negligent funding, in many instances Russian libraries did not have money available even for building their own collections with Russian publications. Lack of funds for purchasing and shipping materials has been the most crippling disadvantage for Russian libraries.
- In addition, the Russian government has failed to support international exchanges. Instead of creating favourable conditions for enhancing or building foreign materials collections, the new Russian government from the beginning has issued legislation that continues to create great obstacles for exchanges.
- In short, Russian libraries did not have enough means, flexibility and experience to obtain materials in the new environment following the downfall of the Soviet Union that resulted, among other things, in loss of bibliographic control and the demise of the Soviet publishing and distribution systems.
- Currently both Russian independent and western vendors can obtain Russian publications from virtually anywhere in Russia in a more organized and efficient way, and deliver them faster to US libraries.
- Finally, there is a cost issue. Although the exchanges are a form of barter, the overwhelming majority of libraries assigns a monetary value to exchange materials for the sake of keeping balances. However, in many instances exchange partners price their

offerings either just slightly below or even higher than vendors without providing the same level of service. One of my colleagues nicely summarized the situation as: “Cost being equal, it is easier to work with a vendor.”

### ***IMPACT OF ELECTRONIC MATERIALS ON EXCHANGES***

The impact of electronic materials on our collections and exchanges is a vast subject and deserves separate study. For this reason it will not be discussed in depth in this paper. However, in my opinion electronic materials eventually will make exchanges obsolete. I envision libraries of the future as providers of remote access to databases and gateways of information.

- Libraries purchase the right to access information for the members of their institutions.
- Access is so expensive that most likely no American institutions will ever be able to pay for their exchange partners.
- When and if Russian libraries create databases and charge for access, it would be easier for American libraries to purchase access rather than barter it.
- The databases created by libraries and other institutions with grant money typically are available on the Internet free of charge.
- Unless electronic information is on CD-ROMs - that is, in one physical unit – it is impossible to exchange it. This format, however, has so many limitations that it does not have much of a future.
- Databases of Russian central and regional newspapers and social sciences journals produced by a commercial vendor and purchased by many American libraries are a good illustration of the point made in this paper. It is less expensive to receive these materials in electronic format; there are no shipping costs and no missing issues, plus global searching is available across the entire database. Moreover, newspapers are available a day ahead because of the time difference, as opposed to several days later by mail in the best-case scenario. Therefore there is no need to subscribe to these titles in paper format from exchange partners or vendors.
- Most likely electronic materials will gradually cause exchanges to deteriorate, but their impact will not be significant for many years to come.

### ***CONCLUSIONS – THE VIEW FROM THE WEST***

- Although somewhat reduced in scale and number, exchange programs are not dead by any means.
- Many libraries still view exchanges as a valuable source for obtaining regional publications and out-of- print books and serials in paper or microform format.
- Exchanges are viewed by some as an important source for receiving or verifying bibliographic information and a way of maintaining professional contacts with Russian and East European counterparts.
- Large libraries with staff allocated to exchanges will probably continue exchange programs.
- Smaller collections with less staff are forced to optimise their resources and find the most efficient and least expensive ways of obtaining Russian publications.
- If Russian exchange partners provide more efficient services and charge less, exchanges will survive and flourish; if not, they will loose the competition to vendors.

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<sup>1</sup> Lenin and Library Organization. Moscow: Progress, 1983. p. 80, 81.

<sup>2</sup> Vugman, I.S. "O mezhdunarodnom knigoobmene u nas I v kapitalisticheskikh stranakh," Sovetskaia bibliografiia vyp.2, p.92.

<sup>3</sup> Lenin and Library Organization, p. 101.

<sup>4</sup> Lenin and Library Organization, p.42

<sup>5</sup> Kann, Marilyn "Cornell University Libraries' Exchange Arrangements With the USSR and Eastern Europe" in Books, Libraries and Information in Slavic and East European Studies: Proceedings of the Second International Conference of Slavic Librarians and Information Specialists. Mariana Tax Choldin, ed. "Russica" Bibliography Series, #8. New York: Russica Publishers, 1986, p. 421

<sup>6</sup> Zilper, Nadia "Assessment of contemporary exchange programs between American and Soviet Libraries". in Books, Libraries and Information in Slavic and East European Studies p.454

<sup>7</sup> Lorkovic, Tatjana and Johnson, Eric A. "Serial and Book Exchanges with the Former Soviet Union" Serials Librarian Vol. 31(4) p. 86.