The Soviet Overseas Information Empire and the Implications of Its Disintegration

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Abstract

Immediately after the founding of the Comecon in 1951, the Soviets began to organize meetings of information workers from socialist countries. Soviet experience had great appeal for developing countries because of Soviet success in transforming a largely illiterate population into a seeming industrial powerhouse. America's image was tarnished in the nonwhite world by continuing legal segregation. Much of the Soviet assistance in encouraging centralization and standardization of information practices abroad was channeled through the International Center for Scientific Information in Moscow. Its stated purpose was to develop the International System for Scientific and Technical Information, which Moscow saw as a vehicle for the inexpensive collection, organization, and dissemination of scientific and technical information throughout the socialist world. The system did ultimately create a set of standards for information formats and numerization for all Comecon countries. The U.S.S.R. also sent out its own experts for on-site technical assistance to information centers in, for example, Hanoi and Havana. Probably the most important method of assistance was the free education that the U.S.S.R. offered thousands of students within the Soviet Union.

Introduction

During the decades immediately preceding 1991, the Soviet Union used its political and economic strength to create an international sphere of influence in fields relating to gathering, organizing, and disseminating information. Soviet initiatives to establish and maintain this sphere of influence were strongest within the "brother socialist states," but they reached beyond the membership of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) to the numerous "nonaligned" nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Funds were expended on such programs as financial assistance for foreign students' graduate study in library and information science, on the organizing of international conferences on information management, and on donations of technical books to the citizens of emerging countries. In terms of dollars spent, the Soviet overseas international assistance program, which peaked in the early 1980s, dwarfed that of the American government, especially because Soviet expansion came at a time of a rapid decline in American overseas aid programs (Childs & McNeil, 1986, p. 208). This paper will describe the ideological background of the Soviets' information offensive and the methods employed by the Soviets both to build up their information hegemony and to defend it against rivals, chief among them the United States. Finally, this paper will discuss the international implications of the empire's sudden dissolution in 1991, which has left a significant portion of the nonindustrialized world with radically diminished information resources.

Ideological Premises

It would be inaccurate to regard the Soviet information empire as simply a twentieth-century descendant of czarist cultural imperialism, which by 1917 had Russified Eurasia from St. Petersburg to the Kamchatka Peninsula in the Northern Pacific. Czarist expansion limited itself to territories contiguous to and eventually annexed by Russia—even far-flung Alaska actually bordered Russia. The Soviets, by contrast, launched cultural offensives in countries as geographically far removed from Russia as Vietnam, Cuba, and Ethiopia. In another major difference between nineteenth-century Russification and Soviet expansion, the bureaucrats of czarist Russia emphasized Russian orthodox Christianity as an integral part of Russian culture, while Soviet officials emphasized instead the uniqueness of the Soviet Union's experience as the world's first socialist (and officially atheist)

country, which they were convinced was of value to the impoverished nations emerging from the yoke of superstition, racism, and imperialism in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. This conviction is the unifying thematic thread that runs through the Soviet scholarly literature on international relations in the 1970s and 1980s (Varaksina, 1976; Gorbacheva, 1981), and it is echoed in the words of scholars from the "socialist brother countries," from Cuba (Le Riverend, 1982) to Vietnam (Bui, 1997).

The Ideological Appeal of Soviet Information Systems

The Soviet socialist approach to information gathering, organization, and dissemination had enormous appeal abroad for a variety of reasons beyond its low monetary set-up and maintenance costs for client nations. Soviet experience in the effective manipulation of scientific and technical information media seemed to hold the key for worldwide socialist industrialization and to the modernization of social infrastructures. As the great colonial empires were dismantled in the decades following World War II, scores of hard-currency–poor new nations were inspired by Russia's twentieth-century transition from feudal absolutism to an apparent industrial powerhouse. The success of the Soviets in wiping out the czarist legacy of mass (75 percent) illiteracy was legendary (Raymond, 1979). The launching of *Sputnik* in 1957 produced worldwide admiration for Soviet technical achievement and seemed to confirm the correlation between Soviet-brand socialism, its characteristic centralized technical information services, and elevated technological productivity.

A speech titled "Lenin's Principles of Librarianship and the Libraries of Socialist Cuba," given in 1982 by the first socialist national library director of Cuba, is a typical expression of admiration for the Soviet model. The director of the José Martí National Library described in 1982 how "we [Cubans] try to copy Lenin's ideas of using libraries to further the revolution by widening reading, stimulating scientific and technical development and awakening a thirst for knowledge" (Le Riverend, 1982, p. 6). The speaker described the lack of support for libraries before Castro's victory in 1959 and the intensive library development and centralization that took place under the umbrella of the national library after the revolution. The national librarian cited the charge of the first session of the Cuban Communist Party for the centralized library system to strive to be more important in "marxist-leninist formation," as well as Lenin's own call for the establishment of chains of libraries and efficient interlibrary loan "so that the people can use every book we have." Under Castro, according to the speaker, Cuba is now "living up to that challenge."

Another factor in the appeal of Soviet socialist information policies was their association with the Marxist doctrine of the international brotherhood of the proletariat, regardless of race. It is hard to overestimate the negative international impact of American racism and the damage to the overseas image of America's material success that was done by continued racial segregation in the United States into the 1960s. Through a barrage of publicity given to institutionalized segregation in American libraries, the Soviet press made it easy for the nonwhite populations of emerging countries to associate American information systems and institutions with American racism. In Soviet eyes this association made the United States peculiarly unsuitable for the leadership of a world that even Harry Truman described as "90% colored" (Sherry, 1995, p. 146). A 1948 article in the Soviet library journal *Bibliotekar'* on "Bourgeois Libraries in the Service of Reaction" (Kozlovskii, 1948a, p. 29) pointed out that only 99 of the existing 734 public libraries in the southern states of the United States had services for African-American readers, adding that "in fact the Negro population of the United States in general lacks the most elementary library services." One month later *Bibliotekar'* returned to the theme of racism in libraries, remarking in a report on the opening of United States Information Services (USIS) libraries in Latin America, sponsored by the Department of State, that "the funds spent on these libraries would be more than adequate to open scores of public libraries for American Negroes, but Uncle Sam's love does not extend to them" (Kozlovskii, 1948b, p. 41). In 1955 a *Bibliotekar'* article titled "Racism in Action" described the beating, arrest, and sentencing in Jackson, Mississippi, of a group of young African Americans who had tried to use the Jackson Public Library. The youths were sentenced to thirty days hard labor and a $100 fine—"a characteristic outcome in contemporary America," according to the article's author (Rasizm v deistvii, 1955, p. 60). By contrast, Marxism, aided by the information systems that produced its apparent efficiency, seemed to offer all peoples, regardless of color, the possibility of access to a dignified existence and material sufficiency.

Beginnings of the Soviet Information Offensive in the 1960s

Within a few years after the founding in 1949 by the Soviets of Comecon, the council began to organize conferences where librarians and information-center

directors from member Eastern European socialist countries (Albania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, Romania and, after 1964, Yugoslavia) could meet with Soviet colleagues. A prime topic of discussion at these conferences was the centralization of information resources so beloved by the Soviets and so attractive to countries with reserves of hard currency inadequate to pay for multiple duplicative information agencies.

A special word is necessary here to explain the importance attached by the Soviets to the standardization and centralization of socialist information systems. By World War II the Soviets had combined mandatory standardization and centralization with a command economy to compensate for lack of resources and trained manpower. Whatever the inefficiencies of such a system, they were more than counterbalanced—in Soviet eyes—by the enhanced control the system offered. It is these two potential contributions—compensation for inadequate resources and enhanced possibilities for political control—that underlie the (continued) fascination of centralized information systems for totalitarian regimes in emerging nations.

Already in the early 1960s the Soviets launched a series of meetings on centralization for research library directors from socialist countries. The proceedings of these meetings in Budapest (1964), Prague (1966), Moscow (1968), Berlin (1970), Sofia (1972), Bucharest (1974), Warsaw (1976), and Pilsen (1979) are a valuable record of the transition of the socialist countries' library and information systems from, in the words of a Hungarian participant, "old, fragmented systems into efficient centralized systems" (Pudov, 1982, p. 48). At a conference offering a retrospective look at two decades of socialist collaboration in centralization on the Soviet model, a Soviet commentator noted that "the process of restructuring the network of public libraries on the principles of centralization and the questions of realizing the Lenin idea of spreading a unified library system in a nation was becoming urgent in all socialist countries." According to the commentator, all the conference participants were convinced that centralization was the most efficient way of raising the national quality of library service (Pudov, 1982, p. 3).

The stress on centralized information services was part of a larger push for efficient and affordable access to current worldwide scientific knowledge that began in the 1950s with the founding in 1952 of the Institute of Technical Information at the Academy of Sciences (which was transformed in 1955 into the All-Union Institute of Scientific and Technical Information—VINITI) (Richards, 1992, p. 273). Soviet willingness to accept the fruits of Western technology despite its bourgeois origins dates back to Lenin, who maintained the old Russian tradition of respect for and reliance on Western research even after the revolution in 1917. When the Bolsheviks came to power, they were—despite their condemnation of Russia's feudal past—careful not to destroy its scientific institutions. They did not want to repeat the mistakes of the French revolutionaries, who abolished the French Academy as a symbol of the *ancien régime* (Vucinich, 1984, p. 93). The Bolshevik leaders were, on the contrary, champions of conventional science. Before the revolution Lenin had written on the theoretical aspects of modern physics, and Trotsky was a star mathematics student. For Lenin science and its derivative technologies were panaceas for Russia's many ills. The old regime had repressed its development and its norms would replace outworn ideologies and superstition (Graham, 1975, p. 19). The fact that these norms had emerged from the bourgeois West did not trouble Lenin, who chastised as "pseudoradicals" those revolutionaries who believed that communism could triumph over capitalism without learning from and working with bourgeois science (Vucinich, 1984, p. 120).

While the immediate post–World War II years were characterized by Soviet xenophobia and a belittling of Western science, the death of Stalin in 1953 and the ascension of N. A. Bulganin to the premiership in 1955 permitted more overt exploitation of Western research. In 1955 Bulganin proclaimed to the Supreme Soviet, "We cannot forget—and we do not have the right to—that technology in capitalist countries does not stand still, but under the influence of the arms race and capitalists' desire for maximum profit, has, in a number of fields, moved ahead" (Barghoorn, 1960, p. 23). This was a public admission of high-level anxiety about Soviet scientific productivity, which, despite the launching of *Sputnik* in 1957, increased through the 1950s. This anxiety culminated in a 1965 report by Nobel laureate P. Kapitsa to the Academy of Sciences claiming that the productivity of Soviet scientists, as measured by the number of publications per individual engaged in research, was only half that of their American counterparts (Kneen, 1985). Bulganin called for more frequent information exchange with foreign scientists, increased purchases of their technical literature, and wider dissemination of foreign science translated into Russian to improve Soviet productivity. This prioritizing of access to world scientific information explains the phenomenal growth of VINITI, whose charges were: 1) abstracting the world's scientific and technical literature; 2) publishing com-

prehensive abstracting journals; and 3) conducting research for improving scientific information work. By the mid-1970s VINITI employed over 25,000 workers, published more than seventy abstracting journal series, and was annually reviewing and abstracting one million scientific and technical articles from 25,000 journals in sixty-five languages (Mikhailov, Chernyi & Giliarevskii, 1984).

The Soviet Union's international activities in information were accelerated after the establishment in 1963 of the Comecon's Permanent Commission for the Coordination of Scientific and Technical Research, which included a Working Group charged with the responsibility of raising the professional qualifications of information workers in the socialist member countries. (After 1962 the membership was joined by Mongolia, while Albania ceased participating in the Comecon after 196l.) Before 1970 eleven conferences were organized by this Working Group on professionalism, including one in September 1965 on "the training and continuing education of personnel of scientific and technical information centers of the Comecon." The conference proceedings were usually published in the various national East European bibliographic journals. During this time the Working Group also organized exhibits on information technology and published a dictionary of information terminology (Mezhdunarodnyi Tsentr, 1977, p. 49).

While the Soviet Union focused especially on improving the delivery of scientific and technical information from the 1950s onward, it also encouraged the centralization of cultural information as well. Cultural information management in the "socialist brother countries" was coordinated by an agency called Informkul'tura based in the Lenin State Library in Moscow. It organized conferences and circulated, by exchange or subscription, information on the Soviet Union's activities for its cultural minorities. The Soviet Union, with its diverse ethnic and linguistic populations—supposedly united into a peace-loving and patriotic "homo sovieticus"—considered itself an exemplar of nonracist and enlightened cultural politics for the masses. Research on "culturology" pursued in the U.S.S.R.'s numerous Institutes of Culture informed the work done by the Lenin State Library both in setting library policy for all the country's public libraries and in developing models to be encouraged by other socialist countries. Beginning in the 1960s the Lenin State Library's model of centralizing the direction of cultural information policy in the central national libraries was instituted in Budapest, Prague, Bucharest, Warsaw, Sofia, Havana, and Hanoi (Pudov, 1982, p. 105).

An excellent example of how Moscow could mix cultural politics with continuing education in information professionalism was the expensive conference it organized in 1975 specifically for librarians and information center directors from nonaligned countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. At this two-part conference, staged consecutively in Moscow and Alma Ata, Kazakhstan, delegates from sixteen countries listened to speeches by ethnic Kazakhs and Uzbekis on the benefits derived by their cultures from Soviet rule and on the importance of librarians being active in the ideological struggle against capitalist imperialism (Varaksina, 1976, p. 82). Delegates from Egypt, Bangladesh, Venezuela, Guinea, Zaire, India, Congo-Brazzaville, Mexico, Yemen, Peru, Senegal, Syria, Somalia, Tunisia, Sri Lanka, and Ethiopia listened to speeches stressing the important ideological role of public libraries in "forming a communist world view." The delegate from Bangladesh stated that all the emerging countries had the same problems with illiteracy that the U.S.S.R. had experienced before 1917 and spoke of possible Soviet aid in providing audiovisual materials to form "libraries for illiterates." The delegate from Senegal said that Senegal wanted to liquidate libraries for the elite and to convert them into "libraries for the masses." The representatives of each country seemed to vie with one another in declaring how much they had learned from the Soviet experience, and the conference terminated in a united declaration by the participants that "the socialist countries have shown us the way and we must follow it to achieve our goals" (Varaksina, 1976, p. 84).

Expansion in Soviet Aid to International Education in the 1970s and 1980s

The extraordinary expansion of the U.S.S.R.'s program underwriting Soviet higher education for foreign students was part of a larger international cultural offensive begun by the Soviets after the global process of decolonialization began in the 1950s. During this process communism had the advantage of its identification with nationalist, anti-imperialistic forces. While the United States, as an ally of both France and Britain in NATO, seemed to be an heir to the old European system, communism appeared to be a liberating force. But there were rivalries even within the communist bloc: The Soviets began to pay closer attention to the emerging post-colonial countries after the 1955 Conference of Asian and African Peoples staged at Bandung in 1955, where they were shocked by the influence of the Communist Chinese. At this time the Soviet student exchange program was still small: In 1953 the U.S.S.R. spent

slightly over $1 billion in foreign communication (including international broadcasting, foreign student aid, trade fair participation, and scientific exchanges). After the 1955 Bandung conference the Soviets prioritized the buildup of the oriental faculties of the Moscow and Leningrad state universities. The agency responsible for the cultural offensive in the newly emerging nations was AGIT-PROP, directly under the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party. One of AGITPROP's subdivisions was VOKS (the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries). VOKS maintained committees of artists and specialists from all fields who acted as advisers in the selection of materials and representatives to be sent abroad. VOKS's policy was 1) to publicize the achievements of Soviet communism so as to demonstrate material progress and 2) to display sympathy for the cultures of the new nations (Bergen, 1962, pp. 121–125).

What had started in the 1950s as a trickle of foreign students arriving to study at Soviet universities and institutes had become a flood by the late 1970s. An increasing proportion of the total foreign student population in the U.S.S.R. was from Africa, Asia, and Latin America rather than from the European socialist countries. The number of foreign students in the U.S.S.R. from Latin American and the Caribbean more than doubled between 1979 and 1985—from 2,900 to 7,600. Cuba, which by 1980 was receiving $10 million a day in Soviet assistance, was a major supplier of foreign students, as was Nicaragua, where annual assistance from the U.S.S.R. had risen from $6 million in 1980 to $580 million in 1986. In 1985 more than 2,500 Nicaraguan students went to the Soviet Union to study. In that year the largest number of foreign students in the U.S.S.R. was from Bolivia, Colombia, and Costa Rica (U.S. Department of State, 1987, pp. 66–68).

Professional training for foreign students expanded accordingly: In-depth training in information science for foreign students was offered in the Soviet Union after 1963 in months-long continuing education courses set up at VINITI in Moscow (Richards, 1992, p. 275). Support for international information training was stepped up after the founding in 1969 of the International Center for Scientific and Technical Information in Moscow. The International Center was a Comecon institution with a mandate to develop and maintain an international system for scientific and technical information in order to standardize and centralize the information systems of all Comecon countries. A formal Institute for the Raising of the Qualifications of Information Workers (IPKIR) was founded in 1971 and located at VINITI. On the basis of bilateral agreements with various socialist countries (but largely funded by Moscow), IPKIR educated, between 1972 and 1976 alone, 853 students from Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany, Mongolia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia. In December 1975 the International Center organized a large conference for teachers of the theory and practice of information systems, in which delegates from Bulgaria, Hungary, East Germany, Cuba, Poland, and Czechoslovakia participated. The following year a resolution by the Plenipotentiary Committee of the members of the International Center approved an ambitious ten-year program (up to 1985) of internships at IPKIR for higher-education teachers, for the publication of teaching manuals based on symposium proceedings, and for graduate study and assistance points for people teaching about technical information systems. In 1977 an academic department of international systems and technical information was organized at IPKIR. In collaboration with the International Center, IPKIR was to serve for the remaining years of the Soviet Union as a central point for 1) the recruitment of information science trainees for the socialist countries; 2) the pooling of training materials and methods; 3) research on training; 4) lectures by leading specialists; and 5) consultation on training personnel for different national systems of scientific and technical information (Mezhdunarodnyi Tsentr, 1977, p. 50). Because of chronic shortages of resources, however, the continuing education program provided to foreign information professionals by the Soviet Union was not always as elaborate or advanced as it appeared on paper.

Another important site used by the Soviets for subsidizing higher education in library and information science was the Krupskaia Institute for Culture in Leningrad. Named after Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaia, the Institute in Leningrad annually hosted an average of a hundred foreign students between 1978 and 1985 in its five-year diploma program (Moskalenko, personal interview, 1997). In addition, between 1974 and 1991, the Krupskaia Institute awarded the doctorate (*kandidat*) in librarianship to twelve Vietnamese, two Sudanese, two Cubans, two Syrians, two Afghanis, and individual librarians from Cambodia, Laos, Guinea, Kenya, and Iraq (Dissertations, 1997). (Some foreign students were also educated in the library and information science faculty of the State Institute of Culture in Kiev, but the Moscow Institute of Culture could not be an international training site because of its coincidental closeness to a restricted military zone [Giliarevskii, personal interview, 1997]).

Most of the foreign students who received free Soviet educations were from families of officials in those countries that had bilateral agreements with the U.S.S.R., whereby the U.S.S.R. would give selected applicants a free higher education. The applicants' names were sent to an international section at the Ministry of Higher Education, which made acceptance decisions. New students were sent for ten months to preparatory faculties (*Podfakul'tety*) all over the Soviet Union, which specialized in Russian instruction and adaptation lessons for specific student populations. A *Podfak* in the capital of the republic of Moldova, for example, specialized in the preparation of French-speaking Africans, and the Patrice Lamumba "University of Friendship of the Peoples" in Moscow primarily addressed the needs of Asian, Latin American, and African students. While students were at their *Podfaky*, decisions were made on where to send them for their higher education. The Ministry of Culture then informed the various institutions which foreign students they would be hosting. In the different cities all over Russia where the students were dispersed for their studies, local organizations played an important role in their reception, organizing cultural tours, parties, camping expeditions, and trips. Foreign students at the Krupskaia Institute, for example, were taken on extended boat cruises through Russia's riverways every summer.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the Russian experiences of these young people, many of whom spent almost six years in the U.S.S.R. as the privileged guests of the Soviet people. By the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 the Krupskaia Institute alone returned to their home countries nearly two thousand graduate librarians fluent in Russian, versed in Russian culture and geography, and convinced of the advantages of centrally controlled information services on the Soviet model. A number of these graduates rose to positions of importance in their home countries and subsequently influenced the development of local information infrastructures. A Vietnamese graduate of the Krupskaia Institute, for example, is currently serving as director of the National Library in Hanoi (Varganova, personal interview, 1998), and the current director of Vietnam's Center for Scientific and Technical Information studied in Moscow at VINITI (Giliarevskii, personal interview, 1997).

Information Systems as an Ideological Defense against Capitalism

While Soviet-subsidized education in library and information science unquestionably raised professional standards in many of the participants' countries, it also served the purpose of politicizing information work by training librarians and technical information workers to act as "active agents in the class struggle." The importance of this ideological training of information workers for countering the threat of capitalist influence was stressed in a 1981 Soviet report on international socialist collaboration on bibliographic control. The report's author noted that the underlying purpose of all the collaborative activities of the past two decades was "the development of a common socialist culture," which would strengthen the various "brother socialist countries" in three ways: 1) by helping to build a stronger scientific and technical base; 2) by assisting in the development of a "proper orientation" to encroaching Western social ideas; and 3) by "arming the brother socialist countries in their struggle with bourgeois, reformist and revisionist ideologies." The author explained the latter as meaning that librarians in socialist countries needed to evaluate the information streaming in from Western sources "with class consciousness and a partisan approach" (Gorbacheva, 1981, p. 6).

Socialist information workers also needed to be warned of the ideological dangers lurking in Western information technology. A recurring theme of the Comecon library professional conferences of the 1970s and 1980s was the need to counter the overseas influence of MARC (machine readable cataloging), which was expanding its original function of making Library of Congress cataloging machine readable by other American libraries and was becoming an international system for the exchange of bibliographic information in machine-readable form. The Soviets claimed that this enabled the United States to exercise ideological influence on the information activities of participating countries (Gorbacheva, 1981, p. 7).

The Soviet International Information System at High Tide: The MSTNI

The principal task of the International Center for Scientific and Technical Information in Moscow was the establishment and maintenance of a socialist international scientific information network [Mezhdunarodnaia Sistema Nauchno-tekhnicheskoi Informatsii, or MSNTI]. The MSNTI was developed in line with the United Nations Technical Information System (NATIS), created by UNESCO in the early 1970s. NATIS proposed the development of coordinated national scientific and technical information systems that would ultimately become the basis of a global standardized information network, UNISIST. NATIS was based on the principle that the best information on printed materials could be

supplied by the countries in which they were produced. UNISIST was conceived specifically to stimulate the creation of national bibliographies for countries without them.

The Soviets intended their own international system to demonstrate superior Soviet experience in information centralization, as well as international Soviet-led collaboration in information science. Furthermore, MSNTI would compensate for the inability of hard-currency–poor socialist countries to pay for multiple copies of expensive Western journals. Ideologically, the MSNTI was justified as a means of supporting the struggle of the masses for peace and disarmament, another of the political themes resonating through the Soviet information literature of the 1970s and 1980s (Gorbacheva, 198l, p. 5; Tvardovskaia, 1984, p. 68). Ultimately, because of the chronic shortage of material resources, the MSNTI never worked in reality as efficiently as it appeared to on paper; on the other hand, it was far from being a sham operation and certainly raised standards in the Soviet client countries.

In the early 1980s the Soviets stepped up their campaign to equate strong socialist information systems with the defense of socialist ideology. At a conference in 1983 at the Lenin State Library on "Librarianship in the Capitalist Countries and the Current Ideological Struggle," participants were reminded of the resolution of the 1983 and 1984 party congresses that "capitalist library theory and practice be relentlessly criticized and that socialist librarians become more active in the formulation of public opinion." They were told that the "spread of American library services all over the world facilitates the infiltration of American ideology. Libraries that use such services will inevitably fall under American control." Electronic databases and the MARC system were cited as the United States' two newest ideological weapons. American "objectivity" was, according to one speaker, simply a pose; American librarianship had always served bourgeois capitalist interests (Tvardovskaia, 1984, p. 78).

Soviet Book Distribution Programs

An important element in the establishment of Soviet influence abroad in many fields was the U.S.S.R.'s support of a massive international book-publishing and distribution program to support its international information offensive. In 1982 alone the Soviet Union produced 74.5 million books in fifty-six non-Soviet languages, a large proportion of these being in scientific and technical fields. That year they published 24.3 million English-language books—more than in any other language the Soviets published. By 1986 one out of every four books produced in the world was published in the Soviet Union, and the Soviet publishing industry was translating more titles than any other country (Childs & McNeil, 1986, pp. 200–204). Ethiopia provides an interesting example of how the Soviets used book distribution to increase its influence in emerging countries. In l973, the year before Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown and replaced by a Marxist government, the Soviet Union did not publish a single title in Amharic. By 1976 it had published fifteen titles in Amharic in 300,000 copies, and by 1980 twenty-four titles in Amharic in 820,000 copies, which probably represented over a third of the world's Amharic book production for that year (Freeman & Righetti, 1984, p. 31). The overseas distribution of publications included extremely low-cost or free issues of the more than seventy abstracting journals published by VINITI in Moscow, with their reviews of scientific and technical articles in sixty-five languages.

Geopolitical Impact of the Soviets' Information Empire

To understand fully the implications of the rise and fall of Soviet influence on the information professions, we have also to take into consideration American reactions to the widening Soviet influence in this sphere from the 1950s on. Evidence of American concern about the presumed efficiency of Soviet technical information abstracting and dissemination dates from even before the *Sputnik* launching and continues right through the 1980s. In 1956 Jesse Shera, dean of the library school at what became Case Western Reserve University, focused on the threat of Soviet information hegemony in his keynote speech to the Special Library Association. He bemoaned the lack of progress in American information technology and called attention to Soviet advances in large-scale abstracting. "What new bibliographic achievements have we to show since the UNESCO Conference on Improving Bibliographic Services met in Paris in 1950?" Shera asked his audience. He warned that "there is more to concern us here than a mere decline in national prestige. On our own ability to put knowledge to work may rest the very future of our civilization and the perpetuation of our cherished way of life. We are engaged in a grim game; we may not long hold all the high cards, if indeed we do now and—make no mistake about it—this time we are playing for keeps" (Shera, 1965, p. 61). When Eugene Garfield launched his new Institute for Scientific Information in 1960, he called it a "free en-

terprise alternative" to VINITI (Garfield, 1960, p. 198), implying that ISI would do for American science what VINITI presumably had done for Soviet science, that is, enhance productivity. Anxiety about VINITI continued through the 1980s: In 1981 MIT convened a conference on Soviet abstracting addressed by George Vladutz, a former VINITI official who had emigrated to the United States and who worked for ISI (Vladutz, 1981).

A full discussion of the American overseas response to the Soviet rivalry in information professionalism during the Cold War lies outside the scope of this paper. The most cursory review of the American library literature of the period, however, shows that American anxieties such as those expressed by Shera were translated into tangible aid programs to stimulate the flow of American technical know-how to parts of the world vulnerable to communist influence. Just a few such programs were the book program for Indonesia starting in 1964, sponsored by the United States National Academy of Sciences; the distribution of twenty million textbooks to the students of the Philippines in the early 1960s, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID); and the use of USAID and Public Law 480 funds to construct the University of Mindanao in the Philippines in 1968 (Kaser, Stone, & Byrd, 1969). In addition, between 1950 and 1962, the United States Information Agency (USIA) financed the publication or translation in English of 13,632 titles in 123,969,405 copies for distribution overseas (Elder, 1968, p. 265). During the post-Vietnam era, the United States reduced the scale of its international initiatives (e.g., withdrawing from UNESCO in 1984). Competition between the Soviet Union and the United States for world ideological leadership nonetheless acted as a brake on American withdrawal from some overseas assistance programs, especially after the first Reagan administration made ascendancy over the "evil empire" an administration priority.

Conclusion

All of the Soviet Union's international assistance programs in information infrastructure development have now stopped. In 1998 the Krupskaia Institute of Culture (now the St. Petersburg Academy of Culture) will graduate its last Moscow-subsidized foreign students. Together with the possibilities of free higher and continuing education, the subsidized flow of scientific and technical information from Moscow to its former client countries has also stopped, as Russia's publishers struggle to survive in a market economy. At this date, the only former members of the Soviet bloc that have substantial access to the world's current scientific and technical information are those such as Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, which have the hard currency to pay for it.

At the same time the non-Soviet agencies that subsidized information to hard-currency–poor countries in the 1970s and 1980s have radically diminished their assistance. UNESCO has been downsizing since the American and British withdrawal in 1984, and the once-lavish book distribution programs of USAID and the USIA have shrunk dramatically. The United States, no longer competing with the U.S.S.R. for the affections of the nonaligned developing world, has shifted its focus to influencing Russia itself. Since 1994, under the aegis of the Freedom Support Act, the USIA has been subsidizing the education of scores of students from the former Soviet Union in American library and information science. Support under this act is not available to students from the former Soviet client states.

Meanwhile, the developing world is littered with centralized, government-operated information centers operating in a virtual vacuum ever since the disappearance of the Soviet information supply upon which they depended. This vacuum can be expected to continue far into the twenty-first century unless another substitute for the market system is found to replace the Soviet Union's assistance programs. For over thirty years they offered a window on the international world of science and technology to countries unable to pay the market price for such access. The officials of a number of developing countries remain convinced today that the Soviet system offered greater advantages to emerging countries than does international capitalism (Bui, 1997, p. 102).

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