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*Introduction**1.1. The study of Soviet book publishing*

In any international comparison, Soviet book publishing stands out on several counts. The first is scale: not only the scale of book copies published, but administrative scale. Soviet publishing, printing and book distribution, with a combined personnel of well over 300 000, are administered in many respects as a single undertaking. The organisational structures and techniques of control used in this administration are vastly more elaborate than those applied to Western publishing.

This great accretion of centralised administrative power is the product of persistent efforts by the Communist Party and the Soviet government to place the processes of book production and dissemination under a considerable degree of supervision – a degree which is, again, prominent in international comparisons. This commitment to effective supervision reflects the importance attributed to the role of publishing in a socialist society, and to the need for books produced under such supervision to be made readily accessible.

Most Western studies of Soviet publishing since the Second World War have devoted their chief attention to the restrictive control mechanisms (primarily censorship), to the effect of such restrictions on the variety of literature published, and to the phenomenon of *samizdat*, or the unauthorised private production and dissemination of material, to which the restrictions contributed.¹ Book publishing has been omitted, or dealt with very briefly, in Western works on the Soviet mass media as a whole.² Indeed, there seems to be a general reluctance in both East and West to accord book publishing the same rank among the mass media as broadcasting and the periodical press.³ Accounts written by Western publishers who have visited the USSR reflect their principal concern with matters of contract negotiation and copyright protection, although the more extended reports also give valuable personal impressions, figures and miscellaneous information on other aspects of Soviet publishing.⁴ The only work in a Western language to attempt a general

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description of the Soviet publishing industry, based on Soviet sources, has been Boris I. Gorokhoff's *Publishing in the USSR* (Bloomington, 1959). Gorokhoff placed his chief emphasis on the formal organisational pattern of the industry and the effects of political influences on its operation. Economic considerations and matters of planning were not treated at length. However, the book's position as the standard work on the subject is being increasingly affected simply by the passage of time. Most of its statistical data is now twenty or more years old; and although the basic purposes and style of Soviet publishing administration have altered surprisingly little, many practices have been modified and many institutions recast and renamed.

The extensive journal and monographic literature on Soviet publishing which appears in the Soviet Union itself consists largely, as might be expected, of communication between practitioners. Soviet studies of publishing in the USSR have shown a strong inclination towards practical matters of organisation and economics.⁵ More fundamental questions of national publishing policy which go beyond operational matters of this kind are debated in print only sporadically. For example, the difficulties of coordinating publishers' and printers' production plans are considered at length in the professional press, and the drawbacks of the present retail price structure have been pointed out on several occasions in recent years. By contrast the factors affecting the decision made in 1975 to increase the output of fiction have received a very limited airing, and the USSR's adherence to the Universal Copyright Convention in 1973 was preceded by no published discussion whatever.

1.2. Soviet publishing policy and the present work

This book is a study of contemporary publishing policy in the Soviet Union, as applied to non-periodical publications. The term 'policy' is open to a variety of interpretations, but is used here to characterise those decisions and actions lying within an organisation's competence which are regarded as most important to its overall objectives.⁶ This definition requires two comments. Firstly, my concern is with decisions *and* actions, not with decisions or 'decision-making' exclusively. I have taken the study of the policy-making process as covering the identification of issues important to the organisations concerned; examination of debates and opinions

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expressed on the issues; and analysis of action taken or avoided in respect of those issues.⁷ These three procedures taken together will sometimes furnish grounds for hypotheses about ‘decision-making’; but, as the previous section has already suggested, Soviet sources do not supply direct evidence of the detailed circumstances surrounding significant decisions in publishing administration, except occasionally at the level of the individual publishing-house.

Secondly, I have treated ‘policy’ as being the *most important* decisions and actions open to an organisation. This requires a consideration of the priorities and imperatives observed by each body (ill-perceived or conflicting though they will be on occasions), and a recognition of the fact that organisations at different levels, or with different interests in the publishing process, will often have different priorities, and will view differing types of decision and action as ‘policy’. For example, a Soviet publishing-house may have a ‘policy’ of paying high (or low) fees to its authors, but the upper and lower limits of the fee scales themselves are a matter of ‘policy’ for the State Committee for Publishing, in consultation with other government departments, the Writers’ Union and probably the Department of Propaganda of the Communist Party’s Central Committee.

The book begins with an account (chapter 2) of the political and social significance and the economic status attributed by Soviet opinion to book publishing, in order to indicate some of the general assumptions and expectations to which book publishing policy is subject. This is followed by treatments of the organisations and groups which are the most authoritative and influential parties to publishing policy: the Communist Party (chapter 3); central government organs, especially the State Committee for Publishing (chapter 4); publishing-houses (chapter 5); authors (chapter 6); the printing and paper industries (chapter 7); the book trade (chapter 8); and the readership of different kinds of publication (chapter 9). The authority or influence of each body in policy-making is assessed with reference to the scope and nature of its powers and obligations (whether formal or informal); the kinds of issue which face it; the ways in which it exercises its powers and meets its obligations in practice, and the priorities and imperatives which it observes in so doing. Chapter 10 presents conclusions. Appendix 1 shows the scales for authors’ fees in force since 1975 in one of the union republics, the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR), and appendix 2 the all-union retail price-list for books, introduced

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in 1972. Neither of these documents has previously appeared in English.

The intention of this approach is to go beyond a simple organisational description of how Soviet publishing 'works', by showing something of the effect on each other of – on the one hand – the peculiarities and limitations characteristic of book publishing as a medium and as an industry, and – on the other hand – contemporary Soviet institutions and accepted Soviet attitudes. A second intention is to illustrate the impact of all the foregoing on books now being published in the Soviet Union, from the content of a single work to the composition of Soviet book production as a whole.

Some limitations in scope should be noted. This is primarily an analysis of contemporary practice in an industry which has changed comparatively little in its formal organisation and relations with the rest of Soviet society since the establishment of the State Committee for the Press in 1963. For this reason events in the history of Soviet book publishing are recounted only where they are felt to be very specifically relevant to its present situation. Secondly, this is not a comparative study of Soviet and Western publishing, although comparisons with publishing outside the USSR have been made on occasion to point up certain contrasts. Thirdly, I have not treated systematically the differences in publishing practice as applied to the various Soviet republics, nationalities or languages; further research in this direction would be rewarding. Finally, I have tried to give the system of formal censorship due significance, and have also dealt with other kinds of scrutiny applied to books; but I have devoted much more space to those matters of policy which bear on the production of over 80 000 different books and pamphlets a year, than to those which prevent or inhibit the appearance of an unknown number of others.

1.3. *Materials used*

Formal statements of policy on publishing affairs, which occur most frequently in Central Committee decrees, have been drawn upon extensively; and the large and varied corpus of Party- and government-approved regulations for the administration of the publishing industry has been examined in detail, in the belief that the instructions which specify and alter the powers of government agencies and publishing enterprises, and which lay down the manner in which they conduct their affairs, compose a framework for their

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operations which expresses policy on many aspects of book publishing. In dealing with the position of the author in Soviet publishing, the civil legislation and accompanying commentaries on authors' rights have been examined with the same intention.

For Soviet comment on official statements and directives, and for accounts throwing light on the manner in which the book publishing system functions in practice, specialised monographs, journals and some newspaper articles have been used – particularly those journals produced by the publishing, printing and bookselling sector for its own staff. The most informative of these, *Izdatel'skoe delo. Referativnaya informatsiya*, is not commercially available in Western countries.⁸ Personal visits to Soviet publishing-houses and other organisations connected with book publishing, in July 1973 and March 1975, made it possible to clarify many points of detail and to gauge, from interviews with senior staff, something of the relative importance which they attached to factors affecting planning processes and economic management. Some use has also been made of accounts published outside the USSR by visiting Western publishers and by individuals with personal experience of Soviet publishing practice.

Soviet publishing statistics, where they are quoted, are accompanied whenever appropriate by a note on definitions used and discrepancies detected. This caution is dictated by an admitted lack of uniformity (at least until a revised method of compilation was adopted in 1974) between statistics recorded by the All-Union Book Chamber and the figures reported by publishing-houses to their own superior authorities.⁹

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The political and economic view of Soviet publishing

The organisations and groups which play a part in Soviet book publishing do so against a background of authoritatively accepted opinion about the position and purposes of book publishing in a socialist society. The views expressed are by no means unanimous in their emphasis. The principles of Party spirit (*partiinosť*), closeness to the people (*narodnost'*), and direction by Party and government are not placed in question;¹ but other matters quite fundamental to the ideological function and economic status of book publishing are under active debate – although a dominant or more deeply established view is often discernible. This chapter examines some of the most important prevailing assumptions and disputes about publishing as an act of industrial production; about demand and pricing; subsidy and profit; quality, effectiveness and optimality; and the power of the reader.

2.1. Publishing as production

There is general acceptance in the USSR that publishing, like the other mass media, is in some sense a cultural, and more specifically an ideological activity. The State Committee for Publishing, Printing and the Book Trade of the USSR Council of Ministers is often classified as an organ of cultural organisation, alongside the Ministry of Culture, the State Committee for Television and Radio, the State Committee for Cinematography, and the Committee for Physical Culture and Sport. To a much greater degree than the other mass media, however, Soviet publishing depends on a considerable industrial capacity to fulfil its cultural and ideological purposes: over 83 000 book and pamphlet volumes in nearly 1.7 thousand million copies were issued in 1975.² The question of publishing's place in the Marxist analysis of production relations continues to arouse controversy which throws some interesting light on Soviet views of the function of publishing, despite the restricted premises on which the argument is conducted.

Marx and Engels are credited with 'having first discovered the

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class nature of the book' (which appears to mean essentially that the purposes of book publishing may be as various as the purposes of any other form of communication), and with having demonstrated the bourgeois transformation of the book into a commodity (*tovar*).³ It is common ground, among modern Soviet commentators on the subject, that a book, though a commodity, is a special kind of commodity; and secondly, that its status in a socialist society is qualitatively different from its status under capitalism. It is claimed that a Soviet author does not 'sell' a 'product', as an author would to a capitalist publisher, because the fee he receives is for the use of his work in the interests of all society, whereas the capitalist publishing-house has the two aims of maximum profit and of serving the interests of bourgeois society.⁴ (Potential clashes of interest between these two imputed aims have not, so far as I know, been further examined.) An excessively profit-orientated approach to publishing, at the expense of what are regarded as the interests of a socialist society, is often warned against; and the admonition has been made that to inflate a publishing-house's profits by such devices as increasing the issue of books in heavy demand, or simplifying the design of a work, is to satisfy 'commercial interests on an unhealthy basis'.⁵

In a socialist society, it is maintained in one line of argument, the value of a book, and hence of a publishing-house's production, is determined basically by its ideological content.⁶ Demand and profitability cannot be allowed to be the sole guides in the matter of which books to publish, otherwise highly specialised works and books in minority languages (to quote two common examples) would never appear. Due to the peculiar nature of the value of its products, this argument continues, publishing is a branch of 'non-material production' (*nematerial'noe proizvodstvo*), and its economics cannot be compared directly with those of manufacturing industry. The view expressed frequently from the late 1920s up to the early 1940s, that publishing was simply another branch of industry, to which industrial terms could be automatically applied, is attacked as a vulgarisation which disregards the ideological function of published matter.⁷

A divergent approach by L. S. Glyazer (who produced the first mathematical model of publishing economics to appear in the USSR, in 1969) took the line that publishing, like broadcasting and the cinema, is 'mental production' (*dukhovnoe proizvodstvo*), but that it is permissible to discuss the economics of mental production

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using the same terms as those applied to material production, and that these terms need not have the 'purely conventional significance' usually attributed to them in evaluating ideological work.⁸

A different argument has been that a book also has a value determined by the expenditure on its production, since production cost is one of the elements (though not the only one) in a book's retail price; and that, for this reason, although the book is an ideological commodity and the chief aim of publishing a work is to achieve a desired social impact, nevertheless a publishing-house functions in both the material and the non-material spheres of production.⁹ A refinement of this view (perhaps an over-refinement) is that the sale for money of books whose purpose is ideological shows the dialectical relationship between ideology and economics in publishing.¹⁰

The printing industry is said to be indisputably a branch of material production, and one which is intended to satisfy mental needs in the same way as industries making television sets or musical instruments;¹¹ but the place assigned to publishing remains unclear. Publishing-houses are regarded as production organisations, mostly operating on *khozraschet* (i.e. as separate accounting units) and subject to the decree 'On the socialist state enterprise' – all of which are characteristics of enterprises in other sectors of Soviet industry; but the State Planning Committee (Gosplan) classifies the planning of publishing as a branch of cultural planning, like the planning of clubs, libraries and broadcasting, and handles publishing through its Department of Culture and Education, separating it from the planning of printing, which is classed as an industry.¹²

The idea of the book as a 'direct force in production', which can contribute measurable improvements to the country's economic performance, has been aired by several Soviet writers. One has gone so far as to estimate savings achieved in the construction industry through the use of certain works on improved organisation,¹³ and others have calculated that engineering plants could gain 8450 roubles per year by improved performance from each machine-tool to which they applied the advice in the book *Adaptivnoe upravlenie stankami* (*Adaptive control of machine-tools*, published by Mashinostroenie in 1973).¹⁴ One scholar has taken this thinking to the point of suggesting that a loss-making book should have its losses made good by a deduction from the profits of the industry in whose interests it was published.¹⁵ The difficulty in applying such calculations to the great majority of books is obvious; but this view

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of the book (or of some books) as having a determinable effect on the economy remains as one argument among others used to justify the publication of loss-making works.

2.2. Demand and pricing policy

The place of reader demand in book publishing has received equivocal treatment in the USSR. It has been generally agreed, as a corollary of the arguments already summarised, that undifferentiated satisfaction of 'raw' demand, as expressed in pre-publication orders and queues in bookshops, is not the primary aim of socialist publishing. Concern is nevertheless expressed over the shortage of books in certain fields – at present particularly fiction and children's books – and over the importance of ensuring the 'right' proportion of each type of book in the total output. It was claimed in 1975, by a deputy chairman of the State Committee for Publishing of the Ukrainian SSR, that supply is further behind demand in publishing than in any other sphere of production aimed at satisfying mental needs.¹⁶

Some Soviet commentators have applied to publishing the distinction between 'demand' (*spros*) and 'need' (*potrebnost*), arguing that publishing should be guided by needs, rather than by demand and (concomitantly) profit. A theme which frequently accompanies this suggestion is that the tastes of the Soviet people must be 'formed', a process in which publishers are said to have an important role.¹⁷ Demand, in other words, must be educated to become more closely identical with authoritatively defined needs; and the book trade has on occasion been accused of placing over-large orders for 'time-honoured' works which presumably reflect uneducated demand. Glyzer has maintained, however, that readers' needs cannot be accurately measured for the purposes of economic decisions, whereas their demand *can* be measured, and should be the basis for determining a pricing structure and fixing rational volumes of production for different types of literature.¹⁸

The approved view of retail pricing policy in Soviet publishing is far removed from that of Glyzer, who appears, in fact, to be advocating that prices should reflect the state of the market and should if necessary be adjusted to alter the demand pattern. The existing price system is regarded by its supporters as an important means of giving effect to a book's ideological function, by ensuring that books intended to be widely accessible bear low prices, even

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though this may lead to some titles, and even entire publishing-houses, making a loss and requiring a subsidy. This policy claims consciously to deny itself the use of higher prices either as a means of limiting demand or as a stimulus to publishers' economic performance.¹⁹

Book retail prices were set separately by each publishing-house until 1952, since when a succession of standard national price-lists has been in force, using the principle of so many kopeks per publisher's sheet. (A sheet is roughly equal to sixteen printed pages.) Although the price-lists have given some recognition to quality of paper and binding, and to the presence of illustrations or colour printing, their major principle of differentiation, which has increased in detail over the years, is by subject-matter. The price-list now in force (introduced in 1972, amended in 1977, and extracts from which are shown in appendix 2) enumerates 191 different types of book and pamphlet according to their subject and intended readership, compared with 129 in the superseded price-list of 1965. The principles on which the price-lists are drawn up have never been stated in detail. Production costs for each type of literature are only one consideration; but it is accepted that, for most types of book, the retail price (less the wholesale discount) should enable the publisher to cover his production costs and make a profit. The production cost element in retail prices is based on average costs and edition sizes for each of the types of work in the price-list.²⁰ Provision is made for works published in small editions to be priced at up to 15k. per sheet to avoid a loss. The basic range of prices is between 2k. and 10k. per sheet, with school textbooks as low as 1k. per sheet. (A kopek – one-hundredth of a rouble – was worth about 0.8 pence or 1.4 cents at the 1977 official rate of exchange.) Books requiring especially complex printing work may be given a price founded directly on production costs.²¹

These exceptional cases apart, however, book retail pricing is not an integral part of the annual and longer-term economic planning cycles in the publishing industry. Prices are not automatically altered to take account of rises in printing and paper costs, although charges for printing and paper have formed an increasing proportion of publishers' production costs, rising from 46.3 per cent in 1947 to 73.3 per cent in 1967 in a selection of central publishing-houses.²² The bulk of prices in the original 1972 list were identical with those laid down in the 1965 list, insofar as direct comparisons are possible, although the extra costs of publishing translations