The earliest reader studies were carried out at the time of the emancipation by educators engaged in developing schools for the peasants. As they taught peasants to read, they sought to understand the impact of the new skills on peasant life. Late in the century, activists in the adult education movement studied lower class readers of books and periodicals in order better to use the printed word to instruct the newly literate. Soviet authorities and educators continued to study the reader with different objectives and biases, but the endeavor was halted in the course of the general paralysis of intellectual life in the 1930s. The study of the reader was resumed in the 1960s, and continues to be a lively area of sociological and historical investigation to the present time.

The pre-revolutionary study of the reader was largely a voluntary effort, sponsored by educators and involving thousands of teachers, librarians, zemstvo correspondents, agronomists, medical assistants, priests, and others who wished to encourage the spread of beneficial printed material among the common people. They hoped to dispel superstition with works of popular science and to uplift the people with works of fiction and poetry by great Russian writers. Some were also inspired by a populist enthusiasm to study the peasantry, and when Marxist ideas gained acceptance, the proletariat became a focus of similar interest. Many who participated in the study of the reader hoped to replace the popular commercial publications that proliferated in the late

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nineteenth-century with a positive literature that would bridge the sharp social divisions in the country. Participants in the nineteenth-century reader studies were motivated by a widely held belief in the power of the printed word to form the life of the individual and society. They studied the common readers' tastes and reactions to literature in order to understand and to influence the social changes taking place in Russia.

Soviet studies of the reader were generally official. They were carried out in the 1920s under the authority of a wide array of institutions, including the political department of the army, the party, the trade unions, the Commissariat of Education, state publishing houses, and various newspapers. Soviet investigators were especially interested in the effects of particular kinds of printed materials on specific groups of readers, rather than in studying the literary taste of the common people more generally. The more pragmatic Soviet approach grew out of the Bolsheviks' experience with propaganda in the revolution and civil war, and out of an ideology that led them to expect a cultural revolution among the common people. A stress on the effects of the printed word on the reader accompanied the belief that man could be remade by changing his environment. From the study of the reader, Soviet political enlighteners hoped to learn how to hasten the emergence of the new socialist man.2

The reader studies of the 1920s were highly selective and often flawed in design. Taken by themselves the results obtained were no more conclusive as to the habits and taste of the Soviet common reader than the less systematic studies of pre-revolutionary investigators. The Soviet studies are, nevertheless, a valuable source for the cultural history of the 1920s. They illuminate our understanding of the dilemmas Soviet policy makers confronted in two key areas. First, in establishing a state monopoly over the production and distribution of the printed word, Soviet publishers and enlighteners looked to the studies as a substitute for information about consumer demand formerly generated by the competitive market. Second, the difficulties encountered and the methods employed in gathering the information about reader preferences are suggestive of more general problems of data collection and quality of data in the 1920s.

Problems particular to Soviet publishing were the impetus for many of the reader studies in the 1920s. During the first decade of Soviet power, shortages of paper, the deterioration of production facilities, technical difficulties, and a slow recovery from the dislocation of war and revolution resulted in greatly curtailed circulation of books and periodicals.3 Under such conditions, it was prudent to avoid waste and to produce materials that the common people

2. O. E. Vol'tsenburg and A. N. Shloberg, Kak ustroit i vesti malenkuiu biblioteku (Petrograd: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1921), p. 35.