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Chambers

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TECHNICAL INFORMATION
of the
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

THE SYMPOSIUM ON TRANSLATIONS

Thursday, 10 Feb. 1949
Room 3E 869, National Defense Building

9 March 1949

MINUTES

The meeting began with statements concerning the Russian translation activities and needs of the agencies represented. The statements are summarized below:

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

Intelligence Division, GSUSA

Mr. Calvert: The Intelligence Division at the present time has a translating unit composed of five translators. They prepare translations, some of which are technical, for various Army agencies. We feel that a translating section is entirely necessary in the Intelligence Division and would not be in agreement with a centralization of translation services.

Quartermaster Corps

Mr. Hodges: We do not have a translation unit. Such Russian translations as are required are prepared by an economist in our Foreign Intelligence Unit. We have little demand at the present time for Russian translations.

Surgeon General's Office; Medical Intelligence Branch

Dr. Gordon: We are not engaged in translation at all. I use original material.

Army Medical Library

Mrs. Coffyn: We have five people on the staff who handle the indexing of Russian material and who prepare translations and transliterations of titles of Russian publications for inclusion in the Index Catalogue of the Library of the Surgeon General's Office and also in the Current List of Medical Literature. We are able to assist readers with oral translations but we do not offer any extensive translation service.

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Chemical Corps

Major Spencer: Our translation work is handled through the Intelligence Division. There is a backlog of 40-50 articles awaiting translation.

Office of Chief Signal Officer

Major Roy: We urgently need to know the physical location of Russian publications. The abstracts we are now receiving are of little value to technical intelligence research. We feel that there is a definite need for a centralized group to coordinate and disseminate translations of theoretical and basic scientific material, such as the publications of the Academy of Science.

Corps of Engineers, Intelligence Division

Mr. Ryan: The Army Map Service of the Corps of Engineers has approximately 17 persons engaged in the preparation of extracts, rather than translations, of Russian material which pertains to current studies.

We feel that there is a definite need for some central coordinated effort — perhaps a central agency where titles, brief abstracts, if possible, and the locations of available translations could be found. It should not be in any sense a directing agency. Our feeling that there is a very definite and desperate need to know the source of material coincides with that expressed by Major Roy. We would be happy to support the establishment of a central agency by sending to it a list of our available translations and by submitting additional lists on a monthly or weekly basis.

Corps of Engineers, Army Map Service.

Mr. Greenacre: We have 17 persons engaged in Slavic language work. However, about 95% of that work is concerned with geographic nomenclature. The translations that we do prepare are restricted to publications on cartography, geography and certain phases of engineering. Some translations are prepared for us on a contract basis. The regular Army Map Service publication which appears every two or three months lists all translations that we have had prepared, and copies of them are available in the Army Map Service Library.

Army Library

Dr. Altmann: The Army Library has a Bibliographical Services Unit in which five subject specialists are engaged in selecting, abstracting and indexing activities. These five persons are also competent in different foreign languages and exchange their knowledge of scientific specialties and languages.

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We feel that there is need for a clearing center in which will be listed all the material that is available in the form of translations of complete articles, books or papers. Such a center could maintain a catalog of translations (including those in preparation) by author, subject and title. A center of this type should be effective in preventing duplication of translations. It should have reproduction facilities so that translations might be reproduced upon request. Preferably, it should not handle classified material. The question of partial translations (abstracts and digests) is another problem which should be considered separately.

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVYOffice of Naval Intelligence

Comdr. Lawder: The Office of Naval Intelligence has a staff of six translators at the present time, two of whom confine their work almost entirely to translating and abstracting Slavic material -- for the most part classified technical documents of particular Naval interest. The Office of Naval Intelligence is most heartily in accord with any movement which will put into effect a central bureau to process Slavic language documents of general interest. We would respectfully suggest that the work of such a bureau be coordinated with that already undertaken by a Central Intelligence Agency group, which prepares abstracts of scientific and technical Russian periodical articles and which maintains records of the translations prepared by the various intelligence agencies. The question of the distinction between intelligence and information must be taken into consideration.

Office of Naval Research

Dr. Smith: There are two ways in which translations are prepared for the Office of Naval Research: 1) by contract with outside agencies, and 2) by the Naval Research Laboratory.

There are two problems which must be considered with the utmost care in setting up any kind of a centralized service. The first is the method of screening material to decide whether or not a translation, abstract or extract should be made; and the second is the type of dissemination which would be most effective not only from a mechanical standpoint but also from the standpoint of reaching the people who can effectively use the information.

Office of Naval Research, Mathematics Branch

Dr. Rees: The Mathematics Branch of ONR has a contract with the American Mathematical Society for reviewing mathematical articles

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published in all languages and which publishes abstracts in Mathematical Reviews. Under this contract we have quite adequate coverage of Russian publications in the field of mathematics. Our procedure for selecting articles to be translated is based on these abstracts. We receive requests from mathematicians for translations of articles of particular interest. A committee of the American Mathematical Society then decides which articles to translate and arranges for the translation. We are just initiating a dissemination service as follows: copies of the translations will be sent to depository libraries of the Library of Congress and also to agencies in the Military Establishment which are known to have an interest in them. Copies will also be available through the American Mathematical Society. We have also had prepared under contract translations of a few current books which are of special interest in connection with our research contracts.

Bureau of Ships, Technical Military Information Branch

Comdr. Otteson: Up to the present time, we have had very little demand for translations of Slavic documents. We would be more interested in a service that would assist in obtaining translations of German documents. We have found it necessary to turn over to private contractors the few documents which we have wished to have translated because there is no translation service in the Military Establishment which meets our requirements. We would, of course, be glad to use any central service that may be established.

Naval Research Laboratory

Mrs. Hooker: The Naval Research Laboratory has one person to translate German, French and Russian material, and perhaps a third of her time is spent on Russian translations. We issue copies of the translations in mimeographed form and distribute them on request. We send copies of them automatically to ONI and to CIA. We are very much interested in the possibility of a union list of translations such as was described by Dr. Altmann. We are also interested in the problem mentioned by Major Roy of the Signal Corps. Those two statements have expressed our views very clearly.

The Special Libraries Association has a translation pool which is operated by a committee. They are attempting to obtain cards containing the essential information concerning translations in existence. Inquiries may be addressed to the chairman of that committee asking if a particular translation has been made, and if that is the case he will indicate where it may be found. This project has not been in operation for very long, so their union list is far from being complete.

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RESTRICTEDDavid W. Taylor Model Basin

Miss Dager: The David Taylor Model Basin has one part-time translator of German and French material. We prepare no translations of Slavic material. Brown University translated 37 Russian articles on plasticity for us on a contract basis. If we now have need of translations that we cannot prepare, we request the Bureau of Ships to have them done for us. However, we feel that it is necessary to be able to prepare translations at the Model Basin because we cannot afford to wait four or six weeks for a translation. We heartily favor a centralized service which could furnish information concerning the existence of translations.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCETechnical Intelligence Division

Mr. Arcier: The Technical Intelligence Division of the Intelligence Department of the Air Materiel Command has, at the present time, one Russian and Polish translator. A merger is being effected between our translation activities and those of the Central Air Documents Office; there will eventually be a total of eight or ten translators of the Slavic languages. We realize that the entire translation problem is an enormous one and that no single organization could assume the whole burden. Inasmuch as there are numerous agencies engaged in translation work, the problem of coordination is the principle one facing us at the present time.

Central Air Documents Office

Col. Arnheim: The Central Air Documents Office, previously the Air Documents Division of the Intelligence Department, has had an extensive translation program during the last three years, but until recently it was concerned for the most part with captured German and Japanese documents. Our Russian document translation work is increasing however, during the past fiscal year about \$65,000 was spent on contracts for Russian translations. We are also preparing a dictionary of Russian air technical terms. Under the new arrangement which Mr. Arcier mentioned, the Technical Intelligence Division will handle Russian translations. The Central Air Documents Office will continue to abstract, catalogue and, whenever feasible, print the translations. All our translations are listed in our Air Technical Index, and some of them are abstracted in our Technical Data Digest. We maintain a sort of union catalogue of all air technical translations made from all languages. While we feel very

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strongly that each specialized agency must have its own translators to handle specialized material, we are also strongly in favor of setting up a coordinating agency which would not itself engage in translating activities.

Aeronautical Chart Service

Mr. Coggin: The Aeronautical Chart Service has only two Russian translators who are engaged primarily in translating the cartographic data on Russian maps. We do some additional work under contract.

About a year ago the possibility of developing a master file of translations within the Military Establishment, was discussed. We had two or three meetings attended by representatives of NME agencies and much interest was shown in the project, but no progress was made beyond the appointment of a subcommittee to assemble information concerning the agencies' requirements and to develop a card incorporating those requirements.

The Aeronautical Chart Service, in cooperation with the Corps of Engineers and the Hydrographic Office, is preparing cards (15 copies of each) containing bibliographic references and abstracts of translations of geodetic and cartographic material. A few extra sets of these cards are available.

We feel that it would be much more feasible to set up a coordinating group than to establish a translating pool because most agencies want to maintain their own translators.

Directorate of Intelligence

Col. Stark: The Air Force is now engaged in organizing an extracting agency to go over the backlog of Russian non-technical material at the Library of Congress. It is estimated that the number of specific items of such material runs into eight figures. This operation is still in its formative stage. Copies of all extracts made will be furnished automatically to CIA and will be made available to the reading panels which summarize various intelligence activities.

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Mr. Bagnall: We are very much interested in translation activities outside of intelligence agencies. We are also interested in any attempt to coordinate such activities, because we are well aware of the extreme shortage of qualified linguists, especially in certain languages. We are endeavoring to keep a record of the translations that are undertaken by the intelligence agencies in order to avoid duplication of effort.

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RESTRICTEDDEPARTMENT OF STATEIntelligence Acquisition and Distribution Division

Mr. Nordbeck: The Department of State has a division of translating services which has two or three people engaged in translating Slavic languages. However, they are entirely occupied in translating diplomatic notes and material connected with the Allied occupation. The Department does have an interest in the program under discussion which is different, perhaps, from the interest of other agencies represented here. Through the American Embassy in Moscow we are in a position to obtain a considerable flow of Russian books, periodicals and newspapers. We feel that the information contained in this material should be made available to all U.S. Government agencies which have a legitimate interest in it. The Department would like to make sure that the material it is obtaining is utilized throughout the Government wherever it is needed. I believe it is impossible to separate the problems of collection, exploitation (in the form of translations, abstracts and bibliographies) and dissemination of material.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIORU. S. Geological Survey, Military Geology Branch

Mr. Dow: We have from six to ten geologists and technical experts who understand Slavic languages, but we do not prepare many translations. We do a considerable amount of abstracting and quite a bit of bibliographic work. We prepare and issue regularly Geophysical Abstracts which cover articles in all foreign languages, including Russian. The Geological Society of America has a group engaged in preparing a bibliography on geography in areas outside the United States; their work involves merely the translation or transliteration of titles and authors.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCEOffice of Technical Services

Mr. Holloway: In the past the Office of Technical Services prepared some translations of German, Italian and French documents, but that was discontinued last year. However, I'd like to mention a project that we have been carrying on successfully for two and a half years. We discovered that private translation firms are translating some of our reports. We have asked them to let us

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know whenever they translate one of our documents and to check with us before they prepare a translation to see if someone else has already prepared it. We publish notices of the existence and the location of the translations in our bibliography. This "translation clearing house" has a record of roughly 5,000 of our documents that have been translated.

Office of International Trade, USSR Branch

Mr. Herman: Our staff has recently been reduced from five analysts to three. We do not maintain a translation service, but those three persons work with Russian material. We survey and abstract about twelve Russian periodicals in the industrial field and three newspapers. I believe there is a need for a clearing house where all activities in the field of translation and abstracting could be coordinated.

National Bureau of Standards

Miss Jones: The National Bureau of Standards has about four scientists whose native language is Russian, and they give assistance informally to the other scientists. No translations are prepared. We are very much interested in ways and means of learning of the availability and the location of material of interest to us. We feel sure that more material is reaching this country than we are able to learn about, and we endorse what has been said here this morning about the desirability of a union list of translations.

U. S. Weather Bureau

Mr. Aldredge: The Weather Bureau has a considerable amount of Russian climatological and hydrological material, all of which is screened by our translator who is also a specialist in our field. No translations are published by the Bureau. We should be glad to furnish cards for a union list or to any other interested agency.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Miss Schindler: The Library of the Department of Agriculture acts as a coordinating agency in securing the services of part-time translators for the bureaus. The translations that are made are limited by the availability of translators and also by the availability of bureau funds. In our bibliography, we include the translated titles, and sometimes a one-sentence description, of Russian agricultural publications which are received in our Library.

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NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR AERONAUTICS

Mr. Miller: The NACA has one Russian Translator available, but very few translations are prepared. We would favor the establishment of any activity that would assist us in securing information pertaining to aeronautical sciences,

U. S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICENational Institute of Health

Mr. Hardy: The National Institute of Health has eight translators engaged on translations of medical material for the various divisions and bureaus of the Public Health Service. We often prepare translations for the Surgeon General of the Army and other service agencies. At the present time we have a backlog of several thousand pages. We would be quite interested in any mechanism which would make our several years' accumulation of translations available to others and which would help us to determine what has already been done.

ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSIONBrookhaven National Laboratory

Mr. Turkevich: The Brookhaven National Laboratory publishes monthly a Guide to Russian Scientific Periodical Literature which includes translations of titles from current Russian periodicals. We are concerned primarily with non-classified literature of general scientific interest. We do not prepare abstracts, but we do translate abstracts prepared by the Russians. We prepare complete translations of significant articles -- those on atomic energy, those that have received a Stalin prize, and those that appear to be good reviews of Russian work in particular fields. Arrangements have been made for a number of large industrial organizations to send copies of the translations they prepare to Brookhaven where photostatic copies are available. The companies welcome a method of making the translations available without divulging where they were made. Some of the universities also deposit translations with us.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Dr. Clapp: The Library of Congress has no translating service, although it produces perhaps a few hundred pages of Russian translations a year. These are prepared in response to official requests and are not

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necessarily in a scientific field. We feel that the first step to be taken, in order to arrive at the objective of making Russian technical literature generally available, is the establishment and maintenance of a central record of what is available, so that we will know as nearly as possible what the Russians are publishing. Since April 1948 the Library of Congress has been issuing monthly accession lists covering all Russian material received by the Library and, insofar as possible, material received by other organizations (including those outside the Government). We do not attempt to translate the titles. We shall be glad to make the accession lists available to anyone who is interested.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Foreign Labor Conditions

Mr. Wash: We have only one professional worker who covers Slavic publications on labor, manpower and living conditions. Articles appearing in these publications are summarized, analyzed and interpreted, and the resulting analytical material and statistical data are published in our Notes on Labor Abroad. We have no translating service.

NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

Division of Medical Sciences

Mr. Oatfield: The Division of Medical Sciences has one person on the staff who prepares Russian translations when they are needed, but we are not now receiving much Russian material.

The Chemical-Biological Coordination Center at the Council is coding on punched cards available data on all chemical compounds. They still have a backlog of U.S. material, but they plan to include Russian data if they can secure it. There are two men on their staff capable of handling Slavic data.

Within the past month, the Special Libraries Association has asked me to serve as chairman of a committee to organize a directory of translators for the country, beginning with the area of science and technology and extending into other fields of knowledge. A notice concerning the project will soon appear in Science and other publications. The directory is meant to be a service to bring together client and translator. We hope to establish some means of evaluating the translators who are registered.

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Dr. Crookshank: We are interested in any means that would enable us to obtain efficiently and accurately Russian material in the fields of biology and agriculture. We prefer to receive scientific articles in their entirety; abstracts are often not sufficient for our purposes because we are interested in knowing the method employed. A complete list of available articles would be very useful.

A general discussion followed the individual presentations. All agreed that there is an urgent need for some central coordinating effort with respect to translations of Russian technical material. There were a number of suggestions regarding the scope of such an effort and the possibility of establishing a central coordinating office.

It was suggested that this coordinating effort need not necessarily be limited to translations of Russian or Slavic material. However, the need for coordination is particularly acute in that area because of the scarcity of qualified translators and because few American scientists and engineers are able to read the Slavic languages.

Agreement was not reached as to whether the proposed central office should maintain records on both classified and unclassified translations. The establishment of a center, however, could serve to make freely available some translations which are now held in a classified category because the agencies which prepared them are not free to divulge their association with the material. They would be willing to make such translations available through an office which would not disclose the source of the translations.

Some of those present felt that the proposed central office should be more than a repository of information concerning the existence and location of translations. They suggested that it should perform one or more of the following additional functions:

Collect information concerning the existence and location of all available Russian documents and publications in this country;

Issue accession lists regularly;

Index and classify its information by subject matter;

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Reproduce translations upon request;

Take steps to put into usable form the large existing collections in this country of uncatalogued Russian literature.

The majority of those present favored a modest beginning, such as the establishment of a central card file containing such information as the titles, authors, and location of translations, including those in preparation. The existence of such a file and its use by translation services should effectively prevent duplication of effort in the preparation of translations. The cataloguing and control of all Russian literature received in this country is tremendously important but may be treated as a separate problem. It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to obtain the funds and manpower for a cataloguing and control operation and a concomitant reference service. Even the preparation and dissemination of accession lists are costly operations. In the opinion of many persons, there are already more lists distributed than the recipients can effectively utilize. If the initial limited effort to record the existence and location of translations is successful, an expansion of the centralized service may be considered.

It was suggested that it might be possible to solve the problem by having each agency send information concerning its Russian documents and translations to the Library of Congress for inclusion in its catalogue and monthly accession list. Mr. Clapp explained why this would not be an adequate solution. The Library has some 75,000 uncatalogued, or incompletely catalogued, Russian books. Its union catalogue lists nothing but books and lists them only by author. Before the catalogue could be genuinely useful it would have to be expanded to include periodicals and to have all material arranged by subject. The monthly accession list of currently received Russian material is not cumulative and the titles listed in it are not translated. The Library has neither the personnel nor the funds to do the work which needs to be done to improve the situation. The costs of the monthly accession list are being paid by the American Council of Learned Societies and the Rockefeller Foundation.

Mr. Clapp offered the part-time services of a member of his staff for the purpose of setting up an experimental card file on available translations and those in preparation. Three-by-five-inch cards could be prepared by the participating agencies and sent to the Library where they would be filed by author. The experiment might determine whether such a file would serve a useful purpose.

It was also suggested that investigation be made of the possibility

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of contracting with an independent organization for the publication of information concerning unclassified translations. Such a publication might become self-sustaining.

The Chairman informed the group that the minutes of the discussion would be transmitted to the Interdepartmental Committee on Scientific Research and Development for consideration and comment.

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