The main problems are the following:

— Academic and scientific institutions and libraries are very short of funds. Subscriptions to foreign journals are now being cancelled and new books are no longer being purchased. This is the situation in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and the problem is even more serious in smaller centers.

— Europe and the United States are in the process of helping Russian libraries by sending them journals and books; however the mailing problem has not yet been overcome. There has to be special agreements with the mathematical societies that are presenting an aid program for the use of express mail, diplomatic channels and Russian mathematicians visiting foreign universities. New solutions must also be found.

— What is actually needed is for young Russian mathematicians to have access to the dozen or so of the leading mathematical journals to give them a picture of modern mathematics.

— The second problem concerns books. Libraries did not obtain many books from western publishers. Of those that had been previously obtained, many of them had been translated into Russian. The translations were then used in other countries of eastern Europe. Now very few foreign books are being translated and this is a serious problem.

— Another very serious problem concerns photocopy machines. Photocopying in Russia has always been problematic, although it is worse now because even if there is a machine, there is no paper, no toner, etc.

Help is urgently needed for our universities and our mathematical centers for books and journals! Thank you.

The Situation of Libraries in Poland

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The purpose of these notes is to present the situation in libraries in Poland from the point of view of mathematicians. To give an impression of the situation in Polish libraries, we shall try to answer a list of simple but important questions, namely:

1. How easy is it to get to the library?
2. Is it possible to find a book or a journal we are looking for in the library?
3. How easy is it to actually access the book or journal, i.e., how long do we have to wait for it?
4. Is it possible to borrow a book or a journal?
5. How easy is it to make a copy of an article we have just found?
6. Is interlibrary cooperation helpful?
7. How easy is it to obtain information on the appearance of new books and periodicals, and of articles in journals?
8. What is the impact of new technologies?
9. What are the main problems and what are the prospects for improvement?

In order to be able to answer these questions, I shall briefly present the organization of higher education in Poland and its consequences for the organization of libraries.

There are about 10 universities and many educational institutions having the status of a university, such as technical universities or medical academies. There is usually one main university library, gathering books and periodicals on all possible subjects. Strictly mathematical libraries can be found in mathematical institutes and departments. There is also one outstanding library of the Mathematical Institute of the Polish Academy of Science. The answers to the above questions depend very much on the kind of library we consider.

Most of the time it is easy to reach the local mathematical library, but the situation is further complicated when more than one mathematics institute exists in a city, which often happens. Since the universities are usually dispersed all over the city, the main university library is sometimes not very conveniently situated.

Main libraries normally have a large amount of books, but they are usually not those a mathematician is looking for. The situation is much better in local mathematical libraries, where even if a book is not in the library, it is often possible to both order and obtain it within a few months.

The situation with periodicals is much worse. Some libraries offer quite a number of different titles, but few are of real importance, and many important ones are missing. Moreover, it is difficult to find a complete set of any particular journal — many issues or even years are missing. The only notable exception is the Library of the Polish Academy of Science. The situation differs from place to place, from good in Warsaw, acceptable in Wroclaw and Kracow, to very bad in other places.

Accessing a book starts with finding it in one of the good but traditional catalogues and continues with asking a library employee to obtain it. The actual waiting time for a book or journal varies from half a minute in a local library to half an hour or longer in the main university library. Only newly-arrived periodicals can be found on the generally accessible shelves.

It is relatively easy to borrow a book or a journal, but in the main library it might mean waiting until the next day. Of course, many books and periodicals are very hard to obtain once they have been borrowed. Getting a book from another library requires a lot of patience.

We are usually well informed on the appearance of new books and periodicals by means of catalogues and newsletters. On the other hand, information on forth-