

Soviet Theater Audiences

Soviet authorities have always maintained that their national theater is a truly popular form of art, enjoyed by broad masses of the people. This view has been expressed or implied in every official statement on the medium for many years. "Soviet theatrical art," according to a 1958 Central Committee statement, "has become a truly popular art, close and comprehensible to the broad masses of the toilers. . . . Our theater, by carrying the most progressive ideas of socialism, peace, and democracy to the masses, has rightly earned widespread recognition, and become an important factor in the development of all progressive art. . . ."1

Claims of this kind have, of course, evoked different reactions among foreign observers. Some, like the author of the "Soviet theatre" entry in the reputable *Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, have been prepared to accept them at face value.² Other people, more cognizant of the failings of official spokesmen, and aware that Soviet theater audiences are not particularly proletarian in bearing or unusually enthusiastic about what they see, have expressed strong disbelief.³ Critics recall that theaters everywhere traditionally cater to a small proportion of the public and see no reason why this should not be so in the Soviet Union as well. It has in fact been calculated that in the late 1960s only about 7.5 percent of the adult population of theater towns of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic went more than once a year. The problem of what social groups the Soviet regime has been able to involve in this activity, how audiences evaluated the works staged, and how healthy the Soviet theater is, in general, have not in the past been open to public analysis. The object of this article is to suggest, largely on the basis of unpublished Soviet materials, some cautious answers.⁴

1. "Vsesoiuznoi konferentsii rabotnikov teatrov, dramaturgov i teatral'nykh kritikov. Privetstvie TsK KPSS," *Pravda*, October 10, 1958, in *KPSS o kul'ture, prosveshchenii, i nauke* (Moscow, 1963), p. 253. This was the first such gathering of the post-Stalin period.

2. London, 1967, p. 824.

3. M. T. Florinsky, *McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Russia and the Soviet Union* (New York, 1961), p. 563.

4. The material used in this paper is of two types. First, we have relied on books and articles which were published in the normal manner. In addition we have made extensive use of results of a survey conducted by Mikhail Deza and Soviet colleagues for the RSFSR Ministry of Culture in 1967-68. The study was entitled "The Theater and the Viewer—An Economic, Mathematical, Sociological Investigation of the Work of Dramatic

Theaters throughout the world have often been subject to state pressures, but few have been regimented to the degree experienced in Russia after October 1917. Leninist theory stipulated strict political control of all artistic media, and the active use of these media for the education of the communist man. The theater, with its direct and living appeal, was soon an object of Bolshevik attention. Within a few days of the Bolshevik coup, the Soviet theater had been taken over by the People's Commissariat of Education and provided with its own commissar. In the spring of 1919, the Commissariat was instructed to halt funds for theaters "of a bourgeois type, inaccessible to the broad masses, and not having cultural or educative significance," and actors deemed to be anti-Soviet were banned from the stage.⁵ On August 26,

Theaters in the RSFSR." (We refer to it in the text as "the RSFSR study" for brevity.) Its object was to discover something about audience composition, theatergoing, and audience preferences—on which no statistics were said to be available (though we would question this). We have at our disposal a few of the collected data from this study and a short exposition of the main findings. The gaps in this material raised difficulties which were not always surmountable. In some of their tables the authors of the study used, for their own comparative purposes, data from a study by K. Kask, "O strukture estonskoi teatral'noi publiki," Report to the Seventh World Congress of Sociology held at Varna, Bulgaria, 1970. We have left these data in the tables presented here.

The following methodological details were provided: "The selective investigation of the theater audiences was conducted by questionnaires (handed out) in fifteen towns at twenty evening performances presented at sixteen base theaters of the RSFSR. Sixty percent of the 7,000 questionnaires were returned. They were processed on an EVM machine. In addition, 360 questionnaires were received from a poll of persons working at two factories in Astrakhan . . ." (p. 3). No further details are available on this sample. With regard to the representativeness of the main sample, the authors wrote: "The theaters were divided into groups according to (a) the number of people in the town and (b) the number of theaters in the town. Three typical groups of theaters were delineated. Then an effort [was made] to insure that the share of questionnaires received from the theaters of a given group should be proportional to the share of the population (of theatergoing age) in the RSFSR towns with this type of theater . . ." (p. 1). The authors went on to claim that, because the proportion of questionnaires returned was about the same in all cases, their object was achieved and the results were in this respect representative for the whole of the RSFSR.

Separate sets of figures were given for audiences of the Sverdlovsk Dramatic Theater (held to be representative of those provincial institutions which try to satisfy the mixed tastes of a local population), the Pushkin Theater (a "normal" Moscow theater), and the *Sovremennik* (an "exclusive" Moscow theater).

The failure of 40 percent of the audience to return questionnaires was not discussed, although this is obviously relevant to the reliability of the conclusions. The investigators themselves indicated that reasons for *not* visiting the theater cannot be adequately deduced from the replies of *theatergoers*, as was done in this case. Reservations were also expressed about the different ways in which certain questions may have been understood and the rudimentary nature of some of the categories employed.

5. Decree approved April 30, 1919, *Dekrety sovetskoi vlasti*, 5 (Moscow, 1971), p. 138. On these problems see also M. Bradshaw, ed., *Soviet Theaters, 1917-41* (New York, 1954).

1919, Lenin signed a decree "On the Unification of the Theaters" which stipulated outright nationalization. A June 1922 statute of Glavlit (the censorship organ) provided for the censoring of play scripts and specified that representatives of educational departments should be responsible for the surveillance of performances.

The rigors of Sovietization did not prevent Soviet drama from enjoying a few years of relatively successful artistic development. People like Mayakovsky and Meyerhold sought to create a new "revolutionary" theater—designed to present contemporary themes for mass consumption. By 1928 the number of theatrical establishments in the USSR had grown to 451, as against 172 in 1913,⁶ indicating the government's cooperation in attempts to increase the coverage of the medium.

It must not be forgotten, incidentally, that there have always been many more cinemas than theaters in the Soviet Union, and that visits to the former have been much more numerous. A discussion of the relative drawing power of the two media, or indeed of the impact of television on either, lies beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the authorities showed an early awareness of the advantages of celluloid for reaching remote settlements. By 1928, the all-Union cinema network comprised some 7,000 units: further development may be traced in table 1, which includes some cinema data. Television has probably been much less competition for theatergoers, as a figure given below will suggest.

The 1930s saw a marked decline in the standards of Soviet drama. In April 1932, the Soviet Union of Writers was established (to the exclusion of all other unconnected literary groups) and the stultifying doctrine of socialist realism became obligatory for the creative arts. In terms of numbers, however, the theater continued to flourish: by 1940 there were apparently over nine hundred establishments (excluding ballet, opera, and children's theaters). Urbanization was now proceeding apace, and the educational programs of the late 1920s were beginning to produce a new Soviet intelligentsia—young people with degrees and, to coin a phrase, play-going potential.

According to official data, the Second World War caused the closure of about 140 theaters. Half of these were reopened after cessation of hostilities, but the Soviet theater was destined to pass through even harder times than it had known in the 1930s. The last years of Stalinism were characterized by stricter censorship, more centralized control, and bureaucratization. The witch-hunts organized by A. Zhdanov in the sphere of culture meant a tense at-

6. *Kul'turnoe stroitel'stvo SSSR* (Moscow, 1956), p. 293. The figures may not be entirely accurate, and no data are provided in this source for the years 1915–27. We use USSR rather than RSFSR figures here and in table 1 because they are more complete.

Table 1. *Growth of Theater and Cinema Facilities*

Year	Number of Theaters		Visits to Theaters (millions)		Number of Cinemas ^a (thousands)		Visits to Cinemas (millions)	
	Total	Excluding ballet, opera, children's theaters	Total	Excluding ballet, opera, children's theaters	Total	Urban only	Total	Urban only
1940	908	693	83.7	—	28.0	8.5	—	—
1945	766	584	—	—	14.5	5.8	—	—
1950	545	410	68.0	48.4	42.0	9.8	1,144	799
1955	508	375	—	—	59.3	12.6	—	—
1960	502	363	91.2	63.2	103.4	18.8	3,611	2,277
1965	501	342	101.3	64.2	145.4	22.3	4,279	2,518
1970	547	364	111.3	70.0	157.0	23.8	4,652	2,844
1971	553	—	114.1	—	157.1	—	—	—

^a Both permanent and mobile.

Sources: *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1972*, p. 668 ff.; *Narodnoe obrazovanie, nauka i kul'tura v SSSR* (Moscow, 1971), p. 333, p. 322.

mosphere for dramatists and actors alike. Not surprisingly, few new plays were produced; directors preferred to rely on the "safe" classics—Chekhov, Ostrovskii, Gorky, and so forth. These were also years of particularly vigorous growth of the cinema network, and this, too, may have affected the demand for live performances. Whatever the balance of factors, the theater network was cut back, and the number of visits apparently slumped. By 1950 there were only 545 establishments throughout the USSR, while visits had fallen by some sixteen million a year as against the 1940 figure (see table 1).

The post-Stalin thaw brought considerable new interest to Soviet drama. Though the overall number of theaters decreased until 1963, fragmentary data suggest that attendances were rising at least from the beginning of the 1950s. Visits to all types of live performances apparently surpassed the 1940 figure in 1958, and reached a total of 111 million by the end of the decade (70 million for the adult theater proper).

It is evident that for most of the years of Soviet power the theater has comprised a reasonably well-developed network. Yet, even by the late 1960s, theater performances were frequented by only a small percentage of the population. The problem of determining who actually went and what these people thought of the Soviet stage was considered as early as the mid-1920s. At that time, a number of research methodologies were proposed,⁷ but the

7. This is a problem which requires further elucidation. Short discussions are to be found in N. Izvekov, "Teatral'nyi Oktiabr'," *Sbornik*, vol. 1 (Moscow-Leningrad, 1926), p. 79, and A. P. Borodin in *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, no. 8 (1925), p. 30.

work seems to have been rather desultory and was stopped, like most Soviet sociological investigation, at the end of the decade. With the resumption of sociological studies in the mid-1960s, some theatrical authorities decided that a new effort should be made, through audience surveys, to examine the relationship between the theater and society, to improve the role of the theater, and to make theater operations generally more efficient. The study of theater audiences in the RSFSR, which we shall now discuss in as much detail as is feasible, was commissioned for this purpose.

The RSFSR study presents some interesting data on the composition of theater audiences. The audiences contained many more people under twenty than the urban age pyramid would suggest, except in Moscow where audiences tended to be older. At the *Sovremennik*, perhaps Moscow's most liberal and sophisticated theater, 70 percent of the audience was bunched in the twenty to forty year-old age groups. Among Soviet theatergoers, women predominated, making up no less than 70 percent of the sample.

Soviet theater audiences were shown to be of overwhelmingly "middle-class" or "intelligentsia" background (table 2). At least 45 percent of the respondents in the RSFSR theaters put themselves in the white collar ("employee") category, while another 34 percent considered themselves to be either from the scientific and artistic intelligentsia or students. Workers, who as a social group made up about 40 percent of the urban population of the RSFSR in 1959, provided only about 11 percent of the theater audiences. No peasants returned questionnaires.

Some interesting regional variations may be discerned. In Moscow, an even higher proportion of the audiences was composed of the more favored

Table 2. *Composition of Soviet Audiences by Social Group*

Social Groups	RSFSR Urban Population, 1959 Census ^a (percent)	Percent of Replies			
		RSFSR	Estonia	Moscow	Sovremen- nik
Employees	20	45.1	41.8	43	40
Workers in science and the arts	2	21.4	9.9	36	45
Students	2	12.3	7.4	8	9
Workers	40	11.4	13.0	3	2
Pensioners	11	4.2	4.4	5	2
Schoolchildren	5	5.2	15.2	2	2
Housewives	20	1.2	1.8	1	1

^a Estimated, to conform with survey categorization, including residual figure for housewives. Population over 16 years of age.

Source: The RSFSR Study, p. 13.

Table 3. *Composition of Soviet Audiences by Educational Level*

Educational Level	RSFSR Urban Population, 1959 Census ^a (percent)	Percent of Replies		
		RSFSR	Estonia	Moscow
Up to 7 classes	40.8	5.0	17.7	1
7-10 classes	32.3	13.5	15.6	5
Secondary general school	10.8	14.3	19.7	9
Secondary specialized school	8.9	17.5	14.0	12
Incomplete higher	0.2	11.5	9.6	11
Higher	5.1	37.5	19.3	60

^a Persons 16 years and older.

Source: The RSFSR Study, p. 21.

social groups. According to these data, no less than 87 percent of theatergoers in Moscow came from among employees, the intelligentsia, and students, while workers filled only 3 percent of the places. The *Sovremennik* had at least 94 percent of its places filled by the first three, non-worker, categories. In Estonia, on the other hand, both intelligentsia and students made up a much smaller proportion of the audiences. (There appears to have been a special effort to attract schoolchildren.)

Given this distribution, it is no surprise to find a pattern of high educational attainment among theatergoers. Table 3 shows that almost one-half of the RSFSR audiences had higher or incomplete higher education, and another 17.5 percent had secondary specialized education. In the whole population over sixteen years of age, only 5.3 percent were in the higher or incomplete higher education categories and 8.9 percent were in the secondary specialized education category in 1959. This suggests that in the mid-1960s people with a degree or the prospect of one were overrepresented in the audiences by a factor of at least six. At the other end of the scale, people with less than seven classes of general schooling appear to have been underrepresented by a factor of eight. In Moscow, the educated nature of the audience was even clearer. Eighty-three percent had secondary specialized education or more. It is not known what proportion of the inhabitants of Moscow had this level of achievement. (Other figures showed the *Sovremennik* to be the most intellectually attractive institution for Moscow's theatergoers—three-quarters of the audience had higher or incomplete higher education.) Audiences in Estonia were distributed rather more evenly throughout the education levels of the population.

Visits to the theater are not the exclusive prerogative of the rich.⁸ Table 4 shows that in the RSFSR the full range of income groups was represented, though there were marked discrepancies at each end of the range. According to our own income estimates, poorer people (in the 50-ruble per capita per month and less bracket) may have been underrepresented by a factor of two. If the students, well-educated but usually impecunious, were excluded, the ratio would no doubt have been much higher. The wealthier sections of the population (comprising persons with a per capita income of over 130 rubles) may have taken four to five times as many seats as they would be entitled to in numerical terms, because as a social group they would number only a few percent. Taken alone, the Moscow figures suggest that this kind of social inequality was more pronounced in the capital. Fewer poor people went to the theater, while a quarter of the audiences might be described by Soviet standards as quite rich. Other figures from the study clearly indicate again how the *Sovremennik* stood out, having 27 percent of its audiences in the topmost category. People in the middle income range (from 70 to 110 rubles a month) were also well represented. However, Muscovites, as a whole, may have been more opulent than the provincials.

Thus, despite the efforts of the authorities, the Soviet theater in the late sixties manifestly failed to assume the truly "popular" character claimed for it. If our data are really representative, the theater served primarily the more advantaged groups in Soviet society.

Theatergoing is a complex topic and one not easily subjected to inter-societal comparison. Yet it is intriguing to compare the results considered so far with studies of audiences in bourgeois societies, where popularization of the theater is not necessarily state policy. The data on American audiences obtained by William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen in the mid-1960s may be used, with caution, for purposes of illustration.⁹ These scholars provided a breakdown of American audiences at theater, ballet, opera, and concert performances between September 1963 and March 1965. The survey produced over 29,000 usable replies, of which some 10,000 were gathered at eighty-eight theaters. The sampling seems to have been done in a satisfactory manner and inspires at least as much confidence as the Soviet work. Some bias was possible insofar as only 50 percent of the forms were returned (as compared to 60 percent in the RSFSR study), but we shall make the bold

8. The need for caution in interpreting this study is, of course, particularly great here.

9. William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen, *The Performing Arts, the Economic Dilemma: A Study of Problems Common to Theater, Opera, Music and Dance* (New York, 1966). Smaller surveys—of the Broadway stage—but ones not without interest, were described by T. G. Moore in *The Economics of the American Theater* (Durham, N.C., 1968). We shall refer to these when necessary.

Table 4. *Composition of Soviet Audiences by per capita Income*

Monthly Income (rubles)	Total Sample (percent)	Moscow Theater Audiences (percent)
Up to 30	5.7	2
30-50	10.0	6
50-70	21.3	15
70-90	17.5	20
90-110	16.2	19
110-130	10.8	14
Over 130	17.3	24

Source: The RSFSR Study, p. 23.

assumption that it was not serious, as, indeed, tests subsequently conducted by the authors indicated. Baumol and Bowen did a smaller, parallel survey in Great Britain, and found audience composition for the performing arts generally similar to that of the United States.

In Russia, as we have noted, theatergoing seemed to be more attractive to women than men. The Baumol and Bowen findings were inconclusive on this, but another American study suggested that this was so in the United States as well.¹⁰ The age of the Soviet audiences was rather low, especially in provincial theaters. The evidence of American surveys here seems to be contradictory, or so intricate as to defy brief analysis.¹¹ However, the main fact to emerge from a comparison of the Soviet and American results is broad similarity of the social groups who filled the theaters in the two countries in the 1960s.

The "middle-class" nature of RSFSR audiences was evident from the fact, already noted, that some 78 percent of them came from the intelligentsia, the "employee," and student groups. According to Baumol and Bowen, 97 percent of American theater audiences consisted of people with professional, managerial, clerical, and sales occupations.¹² Similar social groups in Great Britain made up 95 percent of the audiences. The middle classes thus dominated the theater audiences in all three cases, but whereas Soviet "workers" were shown to be underrepresented by a factor of three, the American and British "blue-collar" were underrepresented by a factor of fifteen or twenty.

The figures for educational achievement tell the same story. About two-

10. T. G. Moore, p. 76.

11. Baumol and Bowen, p. 101.

12. Included, to improve comparability, are American clerical and sales staff, who made up 13 percent of the audiences surveyed. It is doubtful whether these can be considered as belonging to the United States middle classes, but similar categories are included in the Soviet "employees" category. We have attributed students to the middle classes (despite their probable low incomes) in both the American and Soviet data.

thirds of American and half of all British theatergoers had a university degree, as compared with about 10 percent and 3 percent of the relative urban populations.¹³ Soviet theater audiences are on the whole less educated than the American ones, but the same pattern of discrepancy exists. The income breakdowns provided for American and British audiences do not permit close comparison with the few figures available for the Soviet Union, but point to the same conclusions. Forty percent of the American audiences studied were drawn from the richest 5.4 percent of the population, while in Great Britain the proportions were approximately 47 percent and 14 percent respectively. The income imbalance in Soviet audiences was in most theaters probably much less marked than this. Thus, Soviet theatergoers, while drawn from the more favored social groups, may be less “elitist” than audiences in the United States and Great Britain. Many reasons, other than ideological orientation, may account for this. For example, there are proportionately more “workers” in the USSR. It is also possible that “worker” representation in Soviet theater audiences is inflated by administrative means. The organizers of a provincial worker outing may include a theater visit in their timetable, not in response to popular demand, but because it is considered to be educational. (It should be noted again that some figures indicate Moscow theaters—particularly the *Sovremennik*—are very exclusive, like their American counterparts. This may be characteristic of the *best* theaters in all republic capitals.)

Soviet theater audiences covered by the RSFSR survey were asked which themes they liked best. Their order of preferences, as determined in the RSFSR study, may be seen in table 5 (column one). The categories used were presented to the respondents in the form of a closed question for convenience of response and computing. It can be argued that the categorization itself left something to be desired. It is necessary, therefore, to make allowance for the fact that the organizers lacked knowledge of Western experience in this field and chose what seemed most appropriate at that time. The results in column one may be cautiously compared with a separate analysis of plays put on throughout the country (column two).

Table 5 suggests that the theatergoers’ requirements were least satisfied in comedy—humor and satire having suffered heavily from Soviet censorship over the years. There may also have been too few plays on the (social or political) problems of the day and on young people. On the other hand, “psychological dramas,” and possibly detective-type productions, were probably too numerous. One would not, of course, expect a perfect correlation

13. United States figures for 1967 (*United States Statistical Abstract 1968*, p. 111. Persons fourteen years and over, metropolitan.); *United Kingdom—General Household Survey, Introductory Report* (London, 1973), p. 230, abstracted from 10 percent Census (1966), but not closely comparable with the American figure.

Table 5. *Soviet Theater Audiences' Preferred Themes and Actual Play Themes Produced^a*

	Soviet Audiences' Preferred Themes ^b (percent)	Soviet Theater Plays By Theme 1968 ^c (percent)
Comedy	26	15
Psychological Drama	15	23
Contemporary Themes	14	10
Plays about Youth	13	8
Detective Themes	10	14
Historical and Revolutionary Themes	4	5
Classics	18	25

Notes and Sources:

^a The distribution of plays by categories in both columns is of course very approximate.

^b The RSFSR Study, p. 27. Figures adjusted to 100 percent.

^c Analysis of 118 plays taken from list of plays performed 100 times or more on the Soviet stage in 1968, and weighted by number of performances. (*Teatr*, 1968, no. 12.) Methodology on request.

between supply and demand, given the nature of the medium and the difficulties of even approximate measurement. Yet, the theater's response, based on these figures, seems to have been rather insensitive.

It is interesting to consider whether any particular themes were especially popular with given social groups. Some generalizations on this may be drawn from the detailed figures available on the audiences of the Sverdlovsk Dramatic Theater and the Moscow Pushkin Theater.¹⁴ Apparently, appreciation of the classics was more widespread among older people. Upper-age groups were also less interested in youth plays and contemporary themes. All respondents, except those under twenty, seemed to be equally interested in psychological drama. Young people particularly liked plays about youth and detective themes. Women seemed to have a stronger preference for classical and psychological drama than men, but were less interested in detective themes and comedy. The figures available do not allow a facile answer to the impact of education on people's tastes, but one or two trends are obvious. Higher educational achievement seems to go with an increased interest in psychological drama and possibly some lessening of interest in comedy and plays about youth.

The theme preferences did not readily fit any income pattern. With regard to occupational background, the employees and persons working in science, literature, and the arts seemed to share one set of assessments, while

14. The figures for the preferences of the Moscow *Sovremennik* Theater audiences by social group are, unfortunately, too complex to lend themselves to interpretation here. The data included in all some 1,200 entries.

the students and the workers shared another. ("Seemed to" is particularly important here, as the results may have correlated more closely with age.) Thus the first group opted very strongly for the classics and psychological drama, with comedy taking third place; plays on contemporary themes, youth, and crime (or police activities) got very low ratings. Workers and students, except for an interest in comedy, had an inverse pattern. Pensioners mostly opted for the classics, psychological drama, and comedy; only 2 percent listed plays about youth as being of interest.

A preference for certain themes presupposes an even quality of presentation. Most people would no doubt prefer to see a good play on a less interesting theme than a bad play on a favorite theme. In general, the Soviet theatergoer seems to be quite satisfied with what he gets. The RSFSR study showed that up to three-quarters of the audiences thought the repertoires to be of average or high quality, one-fifth expressed no opinion, and only 2 to 3 percent considered them poor or very poor.¹⁵ The average "rating" of repertoires on a point system, however, revealed considerable variations between one theater and another. Theaters in provincial towns (for example, Tula and Velikie Luki) tended to do badly, while the highest recorded score went to the *Sovremennik*.

Some relationship is evident between people's opinions on the repertoires and their social characteristics. According to data on the Sverdlovsk Dramatic and Moscow Pushkin Theaters, the overall assessments of the repertoires seem to be more positive among older people. Evaluations tend to fall as educational attainment rises. According to the researchers' own conclusions (which were, unfortunately, drawn from data not available for further examination) the audiences' appreciation of the repertoire was highest among pensioners and lowest among persons involved in literature and the arts. The poorest people (including perhaps the students) and the richest tended to be most critical.

Empty theater seats are something of a problem in the Soviet Union. In 1968, auditoriums were on average 69.7 percent full, though the figures varied from 40 percent in Azerbaidzhan to 83.9 percent in Latvia.¹⁶ The RSFSR study attempted to find out why members of theater audiences did not go more often. The results are summarized in table 6. (It was not practical to trace and interview people who never attended the theater.)

According to the survey, the most important deterrents to attendance were social and administrative rather than artistic. Predominance of the

15. The organizers of the survey purposely used the term "repertoire" to elucidate attitudes toward the theater in general, rather than the quality of a given performance.

16. V. Zhidkov, "Izucheniia teatra—kompleksnyi podkhod," in *Ekonomika i organizatsiia teatra*, vol. 1 (Leningrad, 1971), p. 68.

Table 6. *Reasons for not visiting the theater more often*

<i>Social Factors</i>	<i>61.4 Percent</i>
Theater far away	20.8
No free time	20.3
High cost of tickets	14.8
Show finishes late	2.5
<i>Information on Shows</i>	<i>19.0 Percent</i>
Bad advertising of plays	6.5
No information beforehand	12.5
<i>Evaluation of Performances</i>	<i>21.2 Percent</i>
Uninteresting repertoire	13.0
Unimaginative production	5.6
Television is better	2.8
Uncomfortable theater	5.8

Source: The RSFSR Study, pp. 31-35. Discrepancies in the subtotals here are probably attributable to exclusion of odd replies in some cases and inclusion of more than one evaluation in others.

distance-transportation problem is explained by the fact that the survey covered provincial towns where transport facilities are very deficient. However, lack of free time, which came second, and the complaint that plays were not properly advertised may have been primarily expressions of indifference. The organizers of the survey indicated that the high cost of tickets was mentioned more frequently by people in the lower income groups, but no figures were provided to support this assertion. Less than one-fifth of the sample explained their absence by dissatisfaction with theater performances.

Another set of data, based on a study of time use in Erevan, has been provided by sociologist, G. S. Petrosian.¹⁷ Petrosian's data disclosed some new and different features. In his study over one-third of the respondents said they did not go to the theater because of the limited repertoire and the poor quality of the performances. One-fifth of the sample indicated the high cost of tickets as the principal barrier. Lack of time and family responsibilities came next. Interestingly enough, the availability of television did not seem to affect people's decisions very much. Petrosian showed elsewhere that television was in fact much more competitive with cinema attendance.

In comparison, the Moore study referred to earlier suggested that the price of theater tickets was the principal barrier to attendance in the United States. Eighty-one percent of enthusiastic theatergoers and over half of the occasional theatergoers mentioned it. Difficulties of commuting and buying tickets were also mentioned by 50 percent of the same group in each case.¹⁸ Of

17. G. S. Petrosian, *Biudzhët vremeni*, vol. 2 (Novosibirsk, 1969), p. 56. This survey was conducted in November 1967 and covered 3,363 workers and employees aged 16-65 of four Erevan factories.

18. T. G. Moore, p. 77. It will be noted that the figures are methodologically not directly comparable.

course, standards of “expensiveness” and convenience were probably quite disparate in the two societies.

The lack of popularity of so many theaters worries the Soviet authorities for two reasons. The first is ideological. Soviet theater is intended to be a powerful weapon in reeducating Soviet man. In addition, good propaganda use is made of it abroad (witness the peregrinations of leading Moscow and Leningrad troupes). An ailing theater, therefore, means a weaker propaganda thrust. The second reason is economic. Soviet theaters are supposed, in principle, to be financially self-supporting, but this is impossible for the great majority of them. State subsidies in 1968 were running at the rate of 53 million rubles per annum.

The failure of the theater to broaden its appeal causes difficulties for actors, as well as for management. The situation in which many actors have found themselves has been graphically described in a recent article by B. M. Shkodin.¹⁹ The average town theater in the RSFSR was, in the late 1960s, losing ninety rubles per performance, and this meant that management and actors were under constant pressure to work harder. The average Soviet troupe of eighteen to thirty members put on no less than 446 performances a year. Faced with disappointing houses in their own theaters, it was apparently standard practice for actors to give over 70 percent of their performances on tour. Each new play could, in fact, be expected to run for only 15 performances in the base theater. The troupe was thus expected to put on a new play every month, in addition to its heavy touring program. All this adversely affected performances and probably led to a further decrease in audiences.

The nature of possible solutions varies according to the writer. N. I. Stepanov, head of the Department of Technical and Economic Research of the *Giproteatr* Institute, and an Honored RSFSR Culture Worker, propounded what might be described as the orthodox view.²⁰ Theaters were losing money, he said, because they failed to give enough shows at the base theater. His calculations indicated that touring, which made up 56 percent of all performances, resulted only in additional losses. He went on to propose, in a familiar vein, some modification of the intricate planning procedures, while still retaining centralized control of all aspects of theater operations. New theater statutes were being prepared which, Stepanov stated in all seriousness, were based on the rules for *industrial enterprises*—“with due regard for the specific nature of the activities of theaters and other such institutions. . . .”

19. B. M. Shkodin, “Gorodskie teatry RSFSR,” in *Ekonomika i organizatsiia teatra*, vol. 1 (Leningrad, 1971).

20. See *Ekonomika i organizatsiia teatra*, vol. 1, p. 74.

(Other sources show that the number of planning indexes which theater managers were required to fulfill was to be reduced to three, and "output norms" for theater performances were to be revised.²¹) Stepanov also said that new emphasis was being placed on survey research into theater-related activities. Two laboratories, established in 1967 and 1970, had begun to concern themselves with measuring potential audiences and their preferences, working out a methodology for coordinating repertoires, closing unsuccessful theaters, improving advertising, and generally collecting much-needed statistical information.

Stepanov finally discussed theater employees' pay. A minimum wage was to be introduced, and rates improved, depending on the number of performances actors gave. The implication that actors had had no minimum previously is very surprising, given the fact that after 1953 a number of laws were passed on minimum wages for *all* state employees. In any case, the half-hearted measures announced by Stepanov inspired little hope of improvement, and official studies of the problems involved seem to have received little attention.

Other suggestions were made by people rather less committed to the official line. For example, B. M. Shkodin argued that more performances in the base theater would not solve the problem. He claimed that there was a real need for the establishment of minimal standards in regard to audience size—the least popular theaters could be closed down, and the managers and actors then would not find themselves struggling in hopeless circumstances.²² In addition, planning should be more sensitive and less concerned with quantitative indexes. Another observer suggested that theaters should have the freedom, at present vested in the central bureaucracies, to fix the prices of their tickets.²³

The story told by the materials examined here requires little further comment. The Soviet theater, despite the growth reflected in official data, has a good deal of excess capacity. It is by no means equally popular among all social groups. Most Soviet theatergoers are from the middle or upper levels of society; the great majority of people never go at all. There is no "theater of the people" in the Soviet Union—indeed, in view of the limited size of theater audiences, it would be naïve to expect one. Some theaters, such as the *Sovremennik*, are almost exclusively the preserve of the more favored social groups. Soviet theater audiences seem to be similar in their social background to American or British audiences. The studies considered do, however, indi-

21. V. Zhidkov, "V usloviakh reformy," *Teatr*, 1970, no. 5, pp. 78–85.

22. B. M. Shkodin, p. 31.

23. See *Ekonomika i organizatsiia teatra*, vol. 1, p. 78.

cate that whereas the "workers" in the United States and Great Britain virtually ignore the theater, the average Soviet audience can boast a small proportion of people who claim proletarian status.

As previously noted, Soviet authorities have tried to determine why members of certain social groups rarely or never attend the theater. These attempts have not been very successful, for the problem is complex. The theater, no matter where, is an art which, even in its most immediate forms, tends toward the esoteric. It is not surprising, therefore, that theatergoing is not uniformly popular to the heterogeneous society of the USSR. The specific character of the repertoire also adds to the problem. Plays put on by Soviet producers are rigorously censored, and not only are many topical problems excluded as a result, but many popular themes—including sex and violence—are under permanent ban. Thus the Soviet theater is less flexible and less able to broaden its appeal than its Western counterpart—where box-office receipts dictate which plays succeed and which plays fail.

Finally, the institution is suffering, like many others in advanced societies, from the discrepancy between limited physical capabilities of live small-group performance, on the one hand, and the extraordinary weight of modern mass media on the other. In these circumstances, the masses tend to choose the most accessible forms of entertainment. Consequently, there seems to be little prospect of significant popularization of Soviet theater in the foreseeable future.