

Thus it turns out that there is no real control in the Soviet Union over the utilization of this product which is in such short supply. As we have seen, even these dull books don't really cause real problems for anybody. I've been told that some workers in the book trade's warehouses are driven to commit some real crimes in this regard. In order to free the storage areas of works that are not being sold, they pour water on the books and then, blaming it all on a hole in the roof or in the walls or on the dilapidated state of the storage premises, they write them off.

A no less sinful but decidedly more dangerous system is as follows: the book trade, hoping to sell the worn-out texts, arranges with the local organs of power to have the many tonnes of books distributed to libraries and offices. There the books and brochures gather dust for about three years and then are sent to the paper recyclers.

This is a very convenient system. You can't, after all, blame the State Committee for Publishing Houses, Printing Plants and the Book Trade or the book trade itself for the fact that a certain book doesn't sell. "What do you mean by 'doesn't sell'?" they will ask. "Everything's been paid off and we even made a profit." We, however, would like to state that this profit is exaggerated and actually not a profit at all. It is society at large that pays for the manufacturing costs of the paper, and for the book that has contributed nothing but harm. This type of book is like a phantom. It may exist but in actual fact it has no positive weight in society. The only winners are the publishers.

Not all these hack works of literature, of course, end up like this. Some of them are bought by me and, no doubt, by some of you readers. We are reduced to doing this in order to satisfy our intellectual curiosity somehow or other.