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Qualitative Aspects of Soviet Bloc Economic Assistance
to Free World Underdeveloped Countries

The quality of Soviet Bloc equipment and construction projects generally is satisfactory to the underdeveloped countries, although there have been scattered reports of mechanical difficulties. While much Soviet Bloc equipment, especially that produced by the machine tool industry, does not reflect as advanced designs as do Western manufactures, it is nonetheless completely adequate for underdeveloped countries.

During 1955 and 1956, in the earlier phase of the Soviet Bloc foreign aid program, some of the products (particularly transportation items) sent to the underdeveloped countries were of inferior manufacture or were unsuitable for the use to which they were put. More recently, however, the Bloc countries have taken steps to upgrade the quality of exports under their assistance program, with the result that complaints are now less frequent and less serious than formerly.

Most of the justifiable criticism of Soviet Bloc products in the past stemmed from the practice of exporting certain items exactly like those used in the Bloc, that is, not modified to take account of local operating conditions. Because the Bloc production approach is to turn out relatively few types of products in each line, it is not always possible to supply types readily adaptable both to the domestic needs of the Bloc and to the needs of the underdeveloped countries. For example, extra-large tractors, designed to pull several large pieces of equipment across the level fields of the large USSR farms, bogged down when used on the small farms in the river valleys of Burma and India. Trucks which performed well under the climatic and road conditions in the Bloc broke down after a few thousand miles of use on the extremely rugged mountain roads of Northern Afghanistan.

A fair number of complaints about Bloc products have been traced to the poor upkeep received by inexperienced operators. To overcome this problem the USSR and Czechoslovakia are providing training in the proper use and maintenance of their equipment exports and in addition have undertaken to establish repair and spare parts services in a number of the underdeveloped countries.

So far as competent US observers have been able to determine, the industrial plants constructed and under construction by the Bloc in the underdeveloped countries are technically well planned and contain high quality equipment and building materials. This observation applies to the steel mill being built by the USSR in India, as well as to a score of other (and smaller) factories being built by the USSR and European Satellites in India and other underdeveloped countries.

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