

Letter from Moscow

More Rockets, Less Rattle

Samar Sen

THE eve of May Day this year was rather unusual. For about four or five days before the festival, things were hard to get. Even butter, always in abundant supply, disappeared from the controlled market, not to speak of meat, fish or fruit. People queued up, grumbled and waited for good luck. The newspapers earned reports of over-fulfilment of the plan from all over the country but Moscow faced a curious scarcity. We all talked about it and wondered, but no one could explain why it happened. Of course, we all knew that things would change on May Day; by that time K would be back from the Black Sea. And things did change. In our area a big food store opened, the number of street vendors went up. The memory of scarcity began to fade.

But the mere fact that it happened shows that bottlenecks, sometimes serious bottlenecks, occur. In the ceaseless agitation for increased production workers and managers of a particular industry face shortage of a vital material and have to move heaven and earth before things return to normal. When persuasion and entreaty and, may be, threats, fail on a local level, they take up the matter with the central authorities and write to the national dailies. Persons are not spared. And on this day (May 5), which is celebrated as Press Day in the Soviet Union, one must acknowledge the power of the Press, it is vigilant and relentless in the pursuit of certain definite objectives at home and abroad.

Accent on Variety

Consumer goods, we all know, are on the increase. But mere quantity no longer satisfies the consumer. He wants variety. In the absence of competition, the producer tends to be lethargic, taking it for granted that his goods will sell. He thinks his only business is to fulfil and overfulfil the plan. He does that, but his products do not sell, they pile up in stores. They have become outmoded. What to do with them is a big problem. Administrators of stores complain

that the producer does not take note of the changing tastes of the purchaser. The producer says that he has not enough right material to accommodate public taste.

At a big house in Moscow, nearly a thousand people work out new designs for garments. Last year they turned out 5,000 designs. But there is a very big gap between design and manufacture. Only a few designs were used. One of the reasons is that the artists are not satisfied with the materials at hand but always look for rare stuff. Also some of the designs are rather exotic. In the exhibition hall of the house, people look around and wonder who will wear these garments.

Sometimes it is possible to turn out new stuff. But by the time it appears, tastes may have changed. The vicious circle again. Millions of roubles are wasted. Time and energy also. Meanwhile, the demand for imported stuff grows.

CIA — the Villain

The freedom movement in the colonies and the threat of aggression by powerful countries have been the main preoccupation of the Soviet Press in the past few weeks. Columns have appeared about Cuba, and quite a few articles by Americans about their country have been translated. Walter Lippman and James Reston have been quoted at length. The obsession with America is understandable. There is a desire to understand the complexities of a big country headed by a young man. The target of attack, it seems, is the General Intelligence Agency headed by Allen Dulles. Foreign reports alleging collusion between the rebel French generals and the U S Secret Service have been played up. Over Cuba there is a lot of real sympathy but no one knows what the Russian reaction will be in the case of fresh landings. The attitude to Kennedy is still one of caution.

On May Day we saw a demonstration of Soviet military might. The rockets were impressive indeed, but the desire to rattle them is less marked now. If they impressed foreigners, no less impressive was

the overriding desire for peace and complete disarmament. There was a riot of colour, there were flowers. All around there was a huge crowd of confident, happy people. And there was Gagarin, symbol of a new age. Encircled Russia has taken a vertical leap.

Soviet Aid

An article in the *Economic Gazette* points out that the Soviet Union today gives economic and technical aid to 20 underdeveloped, countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Credits totalling over 2,000 million roubles (18.97 roubles ~ Rs 100) in new currency have been granted to them. More than 1,000 Soviet specialists are now working in these regions. Engineers, technicians and skilled workers from these regions are being trained in the Soviet Union.

Soviet credits have financed approximately 15 per cent of all investments from foreign sources in India's Second Five Year Plan, more than 33 per cent of such investments in the United Arab Republic's First Five Year Plan and up to 70 per cent in Afghanistan. Nearly 350 industrial enterprises and other projects; were being built in Asia, Africa and Latin America with Soviet help in 1960.

Working in close co-operation with Soviet industries in the construction of such enterprises are other Socialist States, members of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. Today they are helping in the building of 31 industrial enterprises envisaged in inter-governmental agreements between the U S S R and underdeveloped states.

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