Soviet-American Exchanges: For Different Reasons, Both Sides Find Them Advantageous

Amidst the distrust and truculence that afflict East-West relations, the Soviet-American agreement on cultural, educational, scientific, and technical exchanges has fairly well achieved its modest goals. The current agreement, which runs for 2 years, expires 31 December, and negotiations for a new agreement are expected to start shortly in Washington; the indications are that for markedly different reasons each nation finds continuance of the program to be in its interest.

Although the implementation of the program stands out as one of the more hopeful achievements in efforts at Soviet-American cooperation, the program has been marked by frequent squabbles, charges of lack of good faith, and, in some areas, no activity whatsoever. Compared, for example, with the informal, heavy "exchange" traffic that flows naturally between this country and many noncommunist nations, the Soviet-American program is a carefully regulated trickle, constantly under the scrutiny of both governments. Compared with what existed before the agreement, the current traffic is a considerable achievement; prior to the agreement, exchanges were virtually nonexistent.

The agreement that is now in effect has its roots in a limited exchange that developed in the balmy international atmosphere produced by the Geneva Conference in 1955. The reappearance of the East-West chill following the Hungarian revolt the next year blocked expansion of the program. In 1959, however, the two governments signed a 2-year agreement that, in the manner of two parties lacking faith in each other's intentions, detailed the exchanges, tit for tat. Under the agreement, the National Academy of Sciences was designated to work out scientific exchanges with the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. Semantically, this arrangement balanced nicely, but it was soon apparent that it matched a relatively small, nongovernmental body with what in effect is the holding company for much of the Soviet Union's gigantic scientific establishment. This disparity has led to considerable friction.

It is estimated that under the over-all agreement the exchanges between 1 January and 1 July 1961 involved about 3500 Americans going to the Soviet Union and some 2700 Soviet citizens coming to this country. Included in the totals for these years are about 1000 American scientists and about 800 Soviet scientists. Relatively few of these scientific exchanges were carried out under the detailed inter-Academy agreement, which was not intended to be the only framework for exchange in this area. Accounting of the over-all totals is complicated by the budding East-West tourism which often involves individuals who combine business with personal travel. This category of exchanges is inevitably subject to various interpretations and has led to questions of good faith on both sides. American professionals traveling in the Soviet Union have not unnaturally on occasion sought to look up their Soviet counterparts. There is little doubt that this has almost invariably been a matter of individual enterprise. Soviet tourists here are very much under the scrutiny of their government, and when they turn out to be scientists seeking out their American counterparts, it is not unreasonable to assume they are following a design.

Soviet Aims

American officials associated with the program have noted that, not unexpectedly, the Soviets have employed the exchanges as a device for furthering their scientific, technical, and propaganda interests. A State Department review points out: "Most of the problems in exchanges with the Soviet Union flow from the nature of the Soviet system and the differing goals of the two countries. Apparently the Soviet government seeks, first, to gain scientific and technological information from this country, and second, to influence American public opinion more favorably toward the Soviet Union. Our long-term purpose is to reach as many of the Soviet peoples as we can with facts about this country and the truth about its policies and objectives. . . . Our short-term purpose is to find out as much about the Soviet Union and its society as we can, on the supposition that it is much safer to know well one's opponent and competitor. . . .

"The Soviet side pushes steadily for implementation of every possible exchange where it stands to gain information or increase its prestige; in the areas where it lacks interest—long-term or informational exchanges—it drags its feet and astutely places one impediment after another to implementation."

The principal American leverage for assuring reciprocity is the visa authority, which assures complete control over the flow of Soviet visitors. Beyond this power, however, the U.S. has found that the limitation of information about Soviet society makes it difficult to pinpoint what we consider to be desirable exchanges. The reciprocity principle is applied relatively easily to exchanges of orchestras, athletic teams, and exhibits—though even in these areas the U.S. has had to raise the threat of restricting Soviet programs in response to attempts to limit American itineraries. In seeking to arrange equivalent scientific exchanges, however, the Academy here has found itself hampered by the secrecy that surrounds the Soviet scientific establishment. As one Academy official put it: "Soviet science is something of an iceberg. We are aware that there are vast areas, great scientific establishments, of which we know nothing. In some areas, we don't even know who their leading people are. On the other hand, except for those areas bound by military security, we are wide open, and anyone who is willing to make the effort can become well-informed about what is going on where in American science."

The desire to maintain this secrecy is believed to be responsible for Soviet recalcitrance in carrying out the inter-Academy agreement on exchanges at national scientific conferences. At such meetings, it is felt, personal contacts could develop that could lead to a better understanding of the Soviet scientific "iceberg." Since the agreement went into effect, however, the Soviets have shown little cooperation in exchanging lists of national conventions. Last year, the U.S. submitted a list of 23 meetings and waited 3 months before the Soviet list was forthcoming. The latter, it was found, contained only nine meetings, two of which had already taken place with Americans participating outside the inter-Academy agreement. Two others were executive meetings of international organizations, to which the U.S. had access through its membership. Another two were in the social sciences.

An additional source of friction has been in the information exchange program. At the outset the program was hopefully looked upon by U.S. officials as a means for overcoming the traditional Soviet policy of preventing other nations from describing themselves to the Soviet people. One of the principal means for circulating information about this country was to be the

monthly magazine *Amerika,* a slick, picture publication, something in the format of *Life*, which was to be permitted a distribution of 50,000 in the Soviet Union in return for the same circulation here of a similar Soviet magazine, *USSR*. Both are sold through newsstands and subscriptions, and the observation of American officials has been that *Amerika* is immensely sought after by the Soviet people. In this country, however, slick magazine articles on the Soviet Union are not a novelty. *USSR* has encountered sales difficulties, and each month there has been a remainder of several thousand unsold copies. In retaliation for the return of the unsold copies, the Soviets have taken to sending back several thousand copies of *Amerika* as unsalable.

Advocates of a harsh line toward the Soviet Union have berated the exchange program as a form of espionage in which we knowingly permit the Soviets to tap our superior skills. They point to the fact that much of our traffic to the Soviet Union is pretty much on an unorganized basis and is largely determined by the professional interests and personal curiosities of the Americans who are involved; in contrast, there are indications that there is little hit or miss in Soviet interest in what is going on here. "Their efforts," an American official noted, "generally seem to be centrally directed to gaining specific information about fields in which we surpass them."

The counter argument is that the Soviets have learned virtually nothing about American science and technology that was not available to them from freely circulating publications. On the other hand, the exchanges, despite the impediments created by the Soviets, have for the first time given American specialists an opportunity to look at many previously hidden-away aspects of Soviet society. Moreover, it is naive to assume that the U.S. is bypassing opportunities to relate the fruits of the exchange program to the national security.—D.S.G.

Fish Flour: FDA Collects Comments on Protein Supplement

The fish flour controversy (*Science,* 29 Sept.) will soon arrive at the next stage on what promises to be a long and contentious route.

The 60-day period set by the Food and Drug Administration for public comment on the high-protein food supplement expires Wednesday. FDA, which has informally indicated opposition to approving the product for sale in this country, will then study the comments before it issues an order in the case.

The product for which FDA approval is sought is made from whole fish, and is considered to be of great potential for ending protein deficiencies in many of the developing nations. Although the market in this country is regarded to be insignificant, the applicant, the VioBin Co., of Monticello, Ill., feels it would be at a psychological disadvantage in promoting the product abroad if it were not first certified for sale here. FDA approval, formally known as a "standard of identity," is not required for export. FDA has objected to whole fish flour on the ground that it contains parts of the fish not normally eaten in this country. The process reduces the fish to an odorless, tasteless powder, which blends easily with various foods.

The courses open to FDA are to approve VioBin's application as submitted, approve it with modifications, or reject it outright. In any case, parties that feel adversely affected by the decision have the right to a public hearing and eventually an appeal through the federal courts.

FDA reported last week that it had received more than 500 individual comments, including a considerable number from state public health authorities who share FDA's aversion to the product. Several fisheries organizations submitted letters of support.

Fish flour has received considerable attention in the Food for Peace agency, and its director, George McGovern, has expressed dismay at the FDA decision to subject the application to the long and uncertain review process.

There are indications, according to Food for Peace officials, that the agency will be placing emphasis on encouraging manufacture abroad, an awkward thing to do as long as another federal agency refuses to certify it as fit for human consumption at home.

The controversy has aroused the interest of several members of Congress, including Senators Douglas and Saltonstall. For the present they are content to let the FDA review run its course, but a number of members of the House have introduced a bill to exempt the product from FDA jurisdiction.

Birth Control: No Reaction to Revelation of NIH Role

Federal financing of research that bears directly on birth control was publicly disclosed last week for the first time. What was most remarkable, perhaps, was not the revelation, but the lack of any apparent adverse reaction to the disclosure of U.S. involvement in this politically sensitive area. The silence to date has encouraged advocates of population control in their view that a favorable climate of opinion is developing on the subject of the need for this country to seek solutions to the population problems of the developing nations.

The disclosure, contained in a brief article in *Newsweek,* outlined the conclusions of a confidential "Survey of Research on Birth and Population," which was produced by the National Institutes of Health. The survey found that NIH is currently spending the relatively modest sum of $1.3 million on studies related to birth control. The expenditures of private organizations, foundations, and industry bring the annual total to an estimated $5.7 million.

NIH, which has one of the most wide-open information policies of any government agency, has adamantly maintained in the past that none of its expenditures are for birth control activities. As recently as last July, the New York *Times,* on the basis of information from NIH, reported that NIH has "a budget this year of $560,000,000 but not a cent is earmarked for what many consider one of the most serious public health problems in the world—the population crisis."

The NIH survey notes that "any basic research on the process of reproduction is at the same time research in birth control." Since 1955, it reports, the Human Embryology and Development Study Section has made 748 grants. Of the projects current last year, 146 "were found to be relevant, more or less closely, to birth and population control. Sixty-six of the 146 were rated as distinctly relevant." Their funding totaled $976,386.

A statement accompanying the survey concludes that "The climate for research toward birth and population control appears to be undergoing definite change. Those who most keenly sense this change are hopeful that a research area that they feel has enormous public health importance will now receive its due attention."