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KOSYGIN ON THE SOVIET SST

What may be an important hint concerning the timing of the Tupolev 144 (the Soviet supersonic transport) was dropped on 6th December by A.N. Kosygin, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, USSR. Kosygin is certainly the highest-ranking official, although not necessarily the most expert, yet to have commented on the Tu-144's time schedule. But as his remark was made after consultation with Ye.F. Loginov, the Minister of Civil Aviation, it can be presumed to be based on the best expert advice.

Kosygin at the time was inspecting the Concorde, the Anglo-French competitor of the Tu-144, at the works of Sud Aviation in Toulouse. He is quoted by Le Monde (7 December 1966) as replying in the following terms to a questioner who asked when the Tu-144 would fly:

I think it will be before 1970.

He then added with a smile:

But I see no objection to it's happening tomorrow.

The more serious part of Kosygin's reply, i.e. "before 1970," was given after some hesitation and after putting a question to Loginov, according to Le Monde's correspondent. Consequently it seems that Kosygin and Loginov are not yet ready to claim a first-flight date which would match that of the Concorde (28th February 1968), and this would imply that passenger service for the Tu-144 may not at present be planned until the early seventies.

There is therefore some reason to suppose that N. Bykov, a Deputy Minister of Civil Aviation, who is believed by some Western experts to have hinted in August at passenger service for the Tu-144 before 1970, was either misinformed or simply misunderstood.

Loginov's answer to Kosygin's question must this time have been phrased more cautiously than in September, when he said at a press conference in Moscow:

I cannot say exactly when the Tu-144 will be in service, but it will probably be within this five-year plan -- either in this 5-year plan or perhaps a little into the next one. (Reuter, 2 September 1966)

Kosygin's much more conservative formulation suggests that difficulty is still being experienced with the NK-144 engines for the Tu-144, which were known to be a problem in the spring, and that entry into service is not now envisaged before 1971 at the earliest -- the target date for Concorde as well. The Tu-144 is planned to carry 121 passengers at 2,500 km per hr cruising speed. It is built mainly of aluminium, and is therefore more directly comparable to Concorde than to the bigger, faster (and later) U.S. supersonic designs.

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