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FULL TEXT OF ARTICLE:

1. [Article by G. Ponomareva: ''The Difficult Fate of 'Article
4000''']2. [Text] ''We mustn't bury science!'' was the refrain heard at the
scientific-technical council of the ''Thermoplane'' program, which
recently met in the Moscow Aviation Institute.3. As we reported earlier, scientists of this institute have
developed a dirigible with a disk-shaped hull that journalists have
already christened the ''flying saucer.'' The program to develop and
utilize the thermoplane was approved by the government of the
previously existing USSR. More than a couple of dozen enterprises
were brought together for the ''Thermoplane'' program. Including
such well known ones as the ''Energiya'' and ''Molniya''
scientific-production associations, the Academy imeni Dzerzhinskiy of
the Ministry of Defense, and the Design Office imeni Tupolev.4. The unique craft is a qualitatively new transportation resource.
It does not require airfield support. It is not difficult to operate.
It is extremely economical (fuel consumption is three times lower
than that of a Boeing). Its chief merit is its high lifting
capacity. It can be used to deliver large-sized cargo weighing up to
600 tonnes to hard-to-reach areas of Siberia, the North and the Far
East. It provides door-to-door transportation without transloading
and intermediate bases. An undoubtable plus is its ability to perform
installation operations.5. Oilmen and gasmen are interested in the thermoplane as a means of
delivering drilling rigs; builders, geologists, gold miners and power
engineers are interested in it as well. They have even provided money
for construction of an experimental scale model. ''Article 4000,''
which is five times smaller than a full-sized thermoplane, was built

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at the Ulyanovsk Aviation Complex (presently the Aviastar Joint-Stock Company). In the words of general designer Yu. Ishkov, the craft was destined to be born and to die in the assembly shop. It was dismantled in order to check out the residual stresses on the power generating structures. The main goal of the effort was to practically verify the theoretical calculations, to obtain experience in assembling the craft, and to test the reliability of the outer hull. Incidentally, administrators of Aviastar did not allow the thousand meters of excellent rubberized lavsan to go to waste. When the craft was dismantled, the silvery fabric was in great demand. It is said that it can be used to make tents, kayaks and other fishing essentials.

6. It looks as if "genus Thermoplane" has reached extinction following the first experimental model. The second was to undergo flight tests in Volsk, at the Aerostatic Equipment Testing Center, and in August of next year it was to be demonstrated at the air show at Le Bourget. But nothing will come of this--the work has been halted for practical purposes, because there is no money. The "Thermoplane" program does not receive any financing from the budget. And the clients have reconsidered investing money into it. Representatives of the concern "Gazprom," for example, wanted to wait until they saw the flight tests of the first model. They have doubts regarding the craft's stability. Millions have been spent, with nothing to show for them as yet. Obviously other sponsors feel the same way. This year all work on the thermoplane was done "on loan." The developers received only 5 percent of the sum they were promised. This is the fourth month they have not received any wages. If things keep going this way, the idea itself of creating the thermoplane will be frozen for a long period of time. And in the worst case, the results of the work already done will be lost irretrievably.

7. It's regrettable. A burdensome path 10 years long has been traveled, the idea was carried through to the level of flight tests, and now everything is falling apart. Besides the fact that the craft is something the national economy needs, it is also a "child of conversion." Airplane fuselages, ground aircraft support equipment and some components of dismantled military technical facilities could be utilized in its construction. Not to mention utilization of the productive capacities of that same Aviastar. Shops containing unique equipment and cranes capable of millimeter precision are now assembling furniture.

8. In the meantime interest has been shown in the thermoplane idea abroad. In just the last few months, eight foreign delegations have visited Ulyanovsk. Australian television has asked for filming permission. France's National Aerodynamic Research Bureau has offered

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its assistance. Businessmen would like to establish a joint-venture on the basis of the well known principle: "Your ideas, our money." For the moment the collective of the Thermoplane Design Office is rejecting the tempting offers from beyond the border. Will their patience last?

9. Must our science have only one path open to it—a westward one?

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