

U.S. Blockade Causes Cuban Lens Shortage

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Reuters

HAVANA—Cuba is suffering from a chronic shortage of optical lenses.

Deprived of its traditional source of supply by the U. S. blockade, the island has been turning to Canada, Belgium and Socialist countries to fill the gap. So far the quest met with only qualified success.

Readers are still writing letters to the newspapers complaining of long delivery delays.

Basically, the problem is three-fold:

1. The optical industry's machinery is 20 to 25 years old. It is short of spare parts and is officially admitted to be inadequate.

2. Of the three specialized lens cutters which Cuba possesses, only one is in working condition, and that not perfectly.

A part known as the diamond point, which came from the United States, needs replacing and has proved unobtainable in other dollar area countries. Although a

model has been sent to East Germany to copy, officials have not yet heard whether it can be made there.

3. Before the 1959 revolution, Cuba used to import 80 per cent of finished lenses from the United States. It has now turned to Canada for supplies but officials say that they are unable to get them in sufficient quantities. In 1964, for example, Canada was able to supply only two thirds of the \$165,000 order placed by Cuba.

Last December, Cuba purchased seven cylindrical lens cutting machines from Belgium and is considering buying another eight. It intends to invest \$100,000 in equipment this year.

The problem is further complicated, officials say, by an increasing demand for glasses resulting from a better health service. This is especially the case among children. Eye troubles which used to go unnoticed are now detected at an early age.