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## Cast of Thousands

In June of this year the United Nations expects to finish publishing in 33 volumes, at the advance subscription price of \$435, the 2135 scientific papers submitted to the Second International Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy held in Geneva last September. Six volumes in the set are already off the press. The size and speed of this effort make it a considerable feat, the previous record being the production and distribution in 16 volumes of the proceedings of the 1955 atomic energy conference. Although publication of the conference proceedings involves political as well as scientific considerations, it is still fair to ask what will be the place of this record effort in the scientific literature.

One way in which plans to publish the proceedings were probably affected by political considerations was the decision to publish all the scientific papers that were submitted. Since the papers were submitted to the U.N. by governments, not by authors, any attempt to screen them might have been interpreted as a reflection upon the merit, or lack of merit, of particular countries. The participating governments, of course, exercised discretion in deciding which of the papers by their citizens should be sent to the conference, and the governments did assign priorities on the basis of which the U.N. invited papers for oral presentation. But again because of a mixing of political with scientific considerations, the fact that a paper was presented orally did not necessarily mean that it was superior to a paper not so presented.

Publication of the conference proceedings is itself something of an international venture, involving the work of presses in five countries. In addition to the complete English edition, with 15,000 figures and tables and the discussions that followed delivery of papers, the project includes abridged French and Spanish editions in 15 volumes. United Nations officials estimate that the costs for paper and printing will be around \$1.3 million. What papers a Russian edition will include is not yet clear, but its cost is not figured in the present estimate.

The point raised by publication of the proceedings which is of immediate interest to practicing scientists concerns the place of the proceedings in the scientific literature. The decision to include all papers submitted means that papers of little value will be published alongside papers of great value. Since the papers of little value, of which, according to observers, there is an abundance, would not be published in the established scientific journals, there is some doubt that they should be published here. The papers of great value not only would be accepted by the scientific journals, but many indeed are being published in these journals and within approximately the same time span. With the presence of poor papers and the duplication of good papers, the proceedings are not likely to prove of great use. The main advantage of the publication may lie in bringing all the Geneva papers together in one place, but the great bulk decreases this advantage.

How much distribution of the full proceedings of the conference will contribute, not merely to the forward course of science, but to the promotion of international understanding is a harder question to answer. Suffice it to say that people at the United Nations have good hopes for recovering through sale of the volumes their paper and printing costs, and that sales are going mainly to governments, libraries, and industrial concerns. We do not know whether some future U.N. scientific conference will prove even larger than the last one, but if it does we expect to find it followed by an even greater publishing achievement.—J.T.

