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Towards Regulating Cosmic Traffic

It will not spoil the story to say that at the close of Allen Drury's best selling novel, *Advise and Consent*, the Russians have just landed on the moon and claimed it in the name of the Soviet Union. But even as the Russians are planting a No Trespassing sign, the Americans have departed earth and are on their way to dispute the claim. This piece of fiction has the ring of truth, not because the great powers are destined to clash on the moon—the United States and the Soviet Union have each disavowed interest in owning celestial bodies—but because outer space presents many other, and more immediate, opportunities for conflict. Recent achievements in space technology, including bringing satellites safely back to earth, show the urgency for reaching agreements to control military uses of space and regulate peaceful uses.

Last December the United Nations established a permanent Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space to explore scientific and legal matters in this area. But like its predecessor, the temporary United Nations Outer Space Committee, which was boycotted by the Soviet Union on the ground that it was controlled by a majority from the West, the new, permanent committee has been plagued by questions of parity in East-West representation. Agreement was reached on the composition of the new committee. It is composed of seven members from the Soviet bloc, 12 from the West, and five from neutral countries, with the chairman to be selected from a neutral country. But some neutrals are more neutral than others, and a dispute arose over who was to be chairman and from what country he was to be selected.

One of the objectives of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space is to hold an international scientific conference, somewhat along the lines of the 1955 Geneva conference on the peaceful uses of atomic energy. Although the conference was originally proposed by the Soviet Union, the United States responded with such ardor that the Soviets may have grown suspicious about American intentions and decided to proceed cautiously. If the Americans had had their way earlier this year, a two-week conference would be winding up right now. Instead, in the matter of the conference as in that of the committee, proceedings have bogged down in a dispute over who is to be presiding officer. The Soviets wanted a Russian to be secretary general of the conference, while the United States wanted Dag Hammarskjöld to appoint a citizen of a neutral country to the office.

Recently matters regarding the international control of space have begun to look a little brighter, at least in the United Nations space committee and the proposed scientific conference. Informed sources say the United States and the Soviet Union have resolved, or are about to resolve, their differences over the nationality of the presiding officers. The arrangements are to be made in the same spirit as that found in the composition of the committee itself. Settling questions of parity in East-West representation in space activities has been something of a struggle. We hope that at the forthcoming scientific conference on space the concern of governments over parity in management will be matched by an eagerness to share new scientific findings.—J.T.