

NEWS AND COMMENT

(continued from page 850)

panies may yet get their way. The Hughes interests, according to industry rumor, have said they don't need the government's help anyway and plan to launch their barge irrespective of congressional or U.N. action. So the specter that the Japanese, Russian, or French mining vessels may close in on an American barge, with the U.S. Navy coming to defend its claim, may yet become reality.

For one thing, the State Department seems to be bowing to industry pressure and implying that the bravado of the mining interests at the U.N. and in Congress, and the Metcalf-Downing bill's threats of unilateral action, are a helpful club in the negotiations. John Norton Moore, the new chief of the U.S. delegation to the U.N. seabeds meeting, was asked in an interview whether it was confusing to have mining industry spokesmen, with a vested interest opposed to those of the official U.S. delegation, all wheeling around the United Nations. "We're simply doing what is straightforward and honest and conveying very clear signals to other countries—as to what our interests are. . . . I don't think there's any confusion. . . . They all know we have a Congress." Other observers have said that the State Department wants to keep the bill alive as a way of making certain other countries take our views seriously. And in an interview, Moore was surprisingly reluctant to criticize the Metcalf-Downing bill, even though Metcalf is on record as thinking it preposterous. And, as though this were insufficient warmth, Moore downplayed the reports of heavy lobbying by industry advisers to the delegation at seabed meetings.

Even though their favorite bill doesn't stand a chance of passage, the U.S. mining companies may yet launch their proposed undersea mining ventures—with or without the blessing of Congress or the 91-nation Law of the Sea meeting. Such an action could lead to a new congressional examination of the problem reminiscent of the fight over the SST; it could lead to an improved balance of payments and a stunning U.S. technology lead. Or it could lead to chaos over rival mining claims on the seas. In any event, deep-sea mining is sure to stir up more than just a few fish.—DEBORAH SHAPLEY

Erratum: In the letter "Politics of psychiatry" (23 Mar., p. 1184), the first signature should have been Paul L. Watson, not Peter L. Watson.

—EDITOR

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