

Rocket Round the Moon

The Soviet Union has celebrated the second anniversary of Sputnik I by launching a rocket designed to go around the moon and then return toward this planet. If this historic feat succeeds, all humanity will applaud the scientists and technicians who made it possible. Most fascinating, of course, is the possibility that this rocket may provide the first glimpse of the other side of the moon, a view which would be photographed and then transmitted to earth. That would really be the realization of an age-old dream.

Two years ago it would still have seemed incredible that by this date a man-made object would have struck the moon's surface and another would be on its way to photograph the far side of the moon. And it would have seemed almost equally unlikely that by this time the United States would have sent a dozen satellites in orbit, discovered the Van Allen radiation belts in space and made the other historic contributions which have been achieved.

The sheer growth of mankind's—particularly Soviet—capabilities in this field staggers the imagination. Already it is clear that the Nineteen Sixties will see man explore the solar system and perhaps even land on the moon.

No doubt the Soviet Union will exploit this latest rocket feat, as it has earlier ones, for psychological and political warfare. But Karl Marx' argument for socialism was that it would give men a better life on earth. If that be the criterion—as it must to all reasonable men—we need not fear any judgment based upon a comparison of how workers and farmers live here and in the Soviet empire. We may even suspect many Soviet citizens would prefer better housing, more automobiles and some decent highways everywhere to expensive feats in space.

Nevertheless, it can hardly be questioned that the two latest Soviet rocket feats prove that in space exploration and rocket power we still trail the Soviet Union by a wide lap. Since we Americans find it annoying to be second best in matters scientific, it can be expected there will be increasing public pressure for a more effective space program than now exists.

Greater financial support may be part of what is needed. But anyone who has followed our space and rocket progress knows that there are other obstacles besides lack of money: lack of scientists and engineers of top quality, lack of imagination in setting policy, friction and rivalry among the armed services and between the military and civilian directors, ideological opposition to the kind of effective government rocket research which is represented by Werner von Braun and his group, competitive secrecy among firms engaged in some of the different branches of this technology.

It is time to remove these obstacles and frictions and put this nation's rich resources effectively to work on the conquest of space.

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