

The Consular Treaty

It will surprise no one that the Justice Department has declined the Senate Foreign Relations Committee invitation to J. Edgar Hoover to testify on the Soviet-American consular convention. The F.B.I. chief has already done quite enough to aid those who are trying to defeat that agreement by exploiting one of the most transparent, though durable, myths of the present day. That is the belief that the United States Government is composed in large part of innocents lost in a cruel, cruel world, while the Soviet Government consists of practically nothing but an espionage service of chilling efficiency. Once this simple-minded assumption is accepted, opposition to the convention can be justified because it would mean a small increase in the number of Soviet representatives stationed in the United States and enjoying diplomatic immunity.

The truth is that the United States and the Soviet Union both have extensive and highly professional espionage organizations. If the diplomatic immunity clause of the consular convention adds to Soviet capability for spying here, it makes an even greater addition to American capabilities for espionage in the Soviet Union. This is because the United States is an open society, as against the Soviet Union's closed society, and because there are far more Soviet bloc diplomats in this country than there are American diplomats in the Soviet Union. When asked about this matter at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, Under Secretary of State Katzenbach said drily, "The rights are reciprocal."

The convention would provide needed protection for the thousands of Americans who visit the Soviet Union annually as tourists, businessmen or scholars. The real motivation for opposition to the consular convention is, to an important degree, the desire to sabotage President Johnson's essential policy of improving relations with the Soviet Union.

Politicians trying to exploit a primitive anti-Communism might recall that President Johnson is merely continuing a policy which began with President Eisenhower when he went to Geneva in 1955 and invited Nikita Khrushchev here four years later. That policy has paid major dividends in the limited nuclear test-ban treaty and in the Space Treaty signed at the White House last week. Those who would scuttle it will, if they succeed, bear a heavy responsibility before history and the American people.