

# SCIENCE FICTION

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# 183<sup>RD</sup> CONGRESS

BY ROY H. MILLENSON

Only once in many years does an editor have the opportunity of presenting an article that is a landmark. The author is a Congressional employee with a keen insight into governmental problems. Here he presents an accurate glimpse at the Congress of the future.

The electro-magnetic gavel sounded hollowly in the Chamber of the House of Representatives. It had been installed in 2025 A.D. as a compromise between the liberal Southern Republican-Farm Democratic coalition and the powerful conservative bloc from New York City on the question of machine voting in the House (the Senate had settled this the previous year by a similar compromise—installing an automatic bell system for the calling of page boys), and the Speaker of the House sounded it quickly again as the members of the House filed into the chamber, the male members taking their seats to the right and the women to the left. Un-

der the Reorganization Act of 1998 the practice of dividing seating in the House according to party was eliminated as anachronistic and replaced by a geographical arrangement whereby members east of the Mississippi were seated on the right of the Speaker and those from west of the Mississippi on the Speaker's left. However, after the German Wars of the early twenty-first century and the necessary increased participation of women in government, the Congress was again reorganized and divided according to sex (the Kinsey Act of 2098 A.D.).

Excitement was rife as the Premier of Texas (Texas had

been given commonwealth status along with Britain and other semi-independent areas as part of the Russian Reconstruction Act of 2055 A.D.) was to later address a joint session of the House, Senate and Executive Offices.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of the public demand that television facilities be installed in the Capitol so that legislative sessions might be seen in every home in the country, by amendment to the original legislation televue screens were installed in the House and Senate galleries on which were shown citizens from representative parts of the nation, thus bringing the public into the gallery itself. These televue screens now showed a huge audience and all five members of the press gallery were already in their seats.<sup>2</sup> After the chaplain had delivered the usual half-minute invocation,<sup>3</sup> a formal resolu-

tion was adopted to permit the joint session and the ninety-six Senators (one for each state) and 73 Executive Officers filed into the House chamber, flanked by their military, naval, air and press advisers in full-dress uniform, making a very colorful scene indeed. After the address in the Capitol, local officials were scheduled to present the premier with the keys to the city at the traditional ceremonies to be held at the Acheson-MacArthur Memorial Arch which had been erected, it will be recalled, in 1976 during the Era of Good Feeling.

Upon recommendation by the Psychological Advisory Board that soothing music would aid legislators at their work, loud speakers had been installed throughout the Capitol in 2013 A.D. As these Muzakphones blared forth a trumpet call, silence descended upon the throng and the Texas Premier entered escorted by the Chairman of the House American Activities Committee, the Chairman of the Senate Interplanetary Relations Committee and other dignitaries. For almost 150 years, prior to the Cattle Rollback Agreement of 2150 A.D. Texans had subsisted mainly on a diet of beef, thus restricting their growth and the Premier was, like most of his fellow Texans,

<sup>1</sup>The Third Constitutional Convention, in the year 2144, had created a supplemental body in addition to the House and Senate known as "Executive Offices," membership of which was composed of the heads of such independent agencies as the Non-Veterans Bureau, the National Matrimonial Exchange Service and the Sargosa Extracting Authority.

<sup>2</sup>Owing to the extensive popularity of columnists and broadcasters with direct Government connections, "surface coverage"—as reporting directly from the spot had become known—fell into general disrepute and was utilized for background and historical purposes almost exclusively.

<sup>3</sup>Setting a maximum of one-half minute for the opening prayer had been the chief result of the anti-filibuster and debate-restriction drives of the late 1900s.

rather small of stature. The crowd, according to the custom adopted after the 27th Yankee-Dodger series in 2063 A.D., hooted and booed to show its approval. He wore the traditional costume; high-heeled boots, gold-spurs and a 20-gallon hat.

The Texas Premier's address had been anticipated for some time. A strike in the canning and quick-refrigeration industries had resulted in food riots in many communities. Disaster had been narrowly averted only by an intensive propaganda campaign extolling the virtues of unprocessed fresh fruits and vegetables. And now all were awaiting the long-expected announcement of the offer of economic assistance by Texas to the United States. H. Long Cassidy, chief of the Texas Information Bureau, had carefully leaked to key news outlets the contents of this speech and it came as no surprise to either the Congress or the public. A loan of one mil-

lion bucks<sup>4</sup> would be made for the improvement of manufacturing, transportation and storage facilities and young United States technicians would receive training in such skills as television repair, music and lyrics for advertising and propaganda and other worthwhile fields.

After the Premier's address the Senators and Executive Officers departed and the House returned to session. The first speaker was the delegate from the Principality of Brooklyn.<sup>5</sup> "Mr. Speaker," he shouted, "what about a reduction in taxes?" The Speaker looked down and smiled. "That, Mr. Delegate," he replied, "will have to wait until the future."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>After the inflation of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the value of the buck had come to equal \$7,500. Strict credit controls and a studied devaluation had brought this down to the 2151 A. D. level of \$7,025 to one buck.

<sup>5</sup>No footnote actually necessary here. Even in the mid-twentieth century one could see this coming.

<sup>6</sup>A similarity to previous sessions will be noted here.