

trial must be compared to the cost of medical care rather than to the cost of doing other kinds of research. Each day a patient spends in a coronary care unit, he says, costs about \$1000. And there

are about 1 million heart attacks each year in the United States. Many of these heart attack victims die before they ever reach the hospital, but Chalmers points out that those who die represent a

significant economic loss to the country. Critics of the prevention trials contend that the trials would undoubtedly be worthwhile if they indeed showed that particular preventive measures were use-

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Briefing

UFO's Just Will Not Go Away

Federal science officials are now being visited by what many of them regard as a nightmare—an upwelling public interest in Unidentified Flying Objects (UFO's) and requests that the government "do" something about the possibility that they exist. One course of action now being considered is another scientific review similar to the report completed in 1969 for the Air Force by a panel led by the late Edward U. Condon.

The issue arose in July, when the mounting number of inquiries began coming into the White House about UFO's. The White House press office asked Presidential Science Adviser Frank Press whether he could do something about answering this mail. Press's investigation of the matter showed that inquiries from UFO buffs get quite a run around: the White House answers one way, the other federal agencies have their own stock answers, and the Air Force, which has chief responsibility for the issue, says something else. So Press wrote the Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) asking if that agency would take the lead in answering incoming mail.

It was Press's by-the-by paragraph that kicked off the fuss, when he suggested that it might be time for another study of the issue. He even suggested that a new study panel include well-known scientists such as astronomer Carl Sagan of Cornell, who is something of a media star, but is said not to believe Earth has been visited by UFO's.

It should be no surprise to anyone familiar with science-government matters that NASA officials are not relishing the thought of launching such an inquiry and have sidestepped the request by assigning an official to the job of looking at the need for a study. NASA seems to fear that the reopening of the question of the genuineness of visitors from outer space will legitimize a subject most establishment scientists consider phony and a waste of time.

What makes NASA's damned-if-they-

do and damned-if-they-don't dilemma interesting, and even important, is that there is indeed a resurgence of public feeling about UFO's, perhaps due to the hit movie *Star Wars*. According to its promoters, *Star Wars* has sold more than 400 million tickets (a fact all the more significant because there are only 200 million people in the entire United States). A new film, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, has just been released, about a Citizen Joe whose belief in extraterrestrial visitors is eventually proved right—despite NASA, the Air Force, and everyone else. It is likely to also be a box office hit. Surely it will increase the White House UFO mail.

Indeed, there may be evidence that President Carter once was, or now may be, among the 54 percent of the American public that a recent Gallup Poll found believes in UFO's. While Governor of Georgia, Carter filed a report that he had seen a UFO while standing with a group of men at 7:15 p.m. on an October evening outside the Leary, Georgia, Lions Club. The Naval Academy graduate—apparently not aware that the object was probably the planet Venus—described it as being a big as the moon. He wrote "it came close, moved away—came close then moved away... then disappeared."

Moreover, during his presidential campaign, Carter is said to have promised he would release all government information concerning UFO's—a promise which UFO buffs have not let him forget, because of their fervent belief that for many years the government has been covering up its encounters of the third kind.

Truth is as strange as fiction. The Air Force, officials say, indeed classifies some results of its inquiries made after UFO "sightings"—many of which are made near military bases, and by men trained to observe the skies, and a few of which are investigated by Air Force men going up in planes. Press's office says that these facts, together with the conflicting responses the government hands out to UFO buffs who write in, keep alive this belief in a cover-up. Policies like these, officials say, need review and perhaps changing.

In the present climate, then (and who knows when *Close Encounters* will be shown to the First Family), it may become more difficult to avoid another UFO study. Further, it can be argued that scientists in government incur some obligation to respond to the concerns of the public, which, after all, is paying them. On the other hand, it seems clear that federal science officials hope that if push ever comes to shove on the issue of reopening the government's UFO book, the push does not come from them.

SIPI Sells (Out?) Environment Magazine

Environment magazine, which broke the first stories on mercury pollution, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's), and the hazard of steam explosions in nuclear reactors, will close down in its present form at the end of December—a victim of the problems small-circulation journals have in finding a suitable, profitable niche.

The Scientists' Institute for Public Information (SIPI), which owns and publishes *Environment*, has agreed to sell it for \$20,000 to Heldref Publications, a Washington firm that publishes technical journals such as the *Journal of Environmental Health* and *Current*. SIPI will aid Heldref in soliciting outside manuscripts; but there will be no more staff-written articles, which tended to be the news-making ones.

The decision to cut the SIPI-*Environment* umbilical cord has exposed some of the strains within SIPI, an old, New York-based organization that recently has been growing and expanding into new projects such as sponsoring seminars on energy or genetic engineering for members of Congress in Washington (*Science*, 9 April 1976, p. 122). The sale has sparked a number of resignations, on the editorial board and board of directors, by those who say that *Environment*, which is published in St. Louis, Missouri, is more important to SIPI than SIPI's current leaders think.

By selling *Environment* outright, SIPI

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