

mary and observed that the "serious environmental and nuisance problems" of the SST should be avoided and that "a device which has neither commercial attractiveness nor public acceptance" should not be subsidized.

Similar views were expressed by Russell E. Train, who at the time was Under Secretary of Interior. This past May, appearing before Senator William Proxmire's Subcommittee on Economy in Government as chairman of the President's new Council on Environmental Quality, Train said that the two SST prototypes would not in themselves cause environmental problems. And he noted that already the FAA had proposed a ban on all supersonic flight producing a boom detectable at ground level within the United States. He acknowledged that sonic booms might bother people at sea and disturb wildlife, such as birds nesting on isolated islands.

A question which Train said was "highly speculative" but worthy of careful attention is whether the water vapor put into the stratosphere by the SST would bring on possibly disastrous environmental changes. One conceivable effect would be to increase the earth's cloud cover and cause climatic change. Another would be to reduce the ozone in the stratosphere enough to impair the earth's shielding from destructive ultraviolet radiation.

Train indicated that the SST's clearest environmental threat is that its powerful engines may produce a frightful din for people at or close to airports. According to him, the "airport noise" made by the SST early during take off would be three to four times louder than that allowed for subsonic jets, although the "community noise" made by the SST during its steep ascent and later during landings should be tolerable. Train assured Proxmire, however, that the administration will not permit the environment in and around airports to be degraded by increased noise. But the noise standards set by the FAA must, as a matter of law, be "economically reasonable, technologically practicable, and appropriate for the particular type of aircraft" to which they apply. This means, beyond doubt, that the airport noise standards which the agency will soon propose for supersonic aircraft will be more permissive than those that apply to subsonic jets. If they should not be more lenient, the Concorde and the American SST would be denied use of U.S. airports.

The National Environmental Policy

Act (NEPA) of 1969 under which Train's council was established calls for agencies to report on the potential environmental impact of their actions. Department of Transportation officials have briefed the council on the SST, but the extensive report contemplated under NEPA is not expected to be ready for several months. A suit brought by a leader of Friends of the Earth and a Sierra Club official demands that such a report be filed immediately, before more money for the SST can be appropriated. And a petition filed by the Environmental Defense Fund calls for an immediate start on rule-making proceedings for the setting of noise and other environmental standards for the SST.

Ironically, the senator chiefly responsible for the passage of NEPA was Henry Jackson, who is both a leader of conservation causes in Congress and one of the SST's leading advocates.

Research Expanded

Although no one can now clearly foresee the environmental effects of the SST, the federal research effort on aircraft noise suppression, upper atmosphere phenomena, and other topics related to the SST is being expanded. In fact, early this week William M. Magruder, director of SST development, announced to a National Press Club audience that up to \$27.6 million will be spent on such research over the next 4 years. Magruder said that two independent advisory councils, one on atmospheric problems, the other on noise suppression, are being set up to help guide the research effort.

The Concorde will be undergoing trial flights at its top design speed off the British coast later this summer. Unless the Concorde's sonic boom leads to mass protests or the plane's performance falls far below expectations, proponents of the SST will point again to what they regard as alarming evidence that the United States may lose its leadership in aviation. So it has gone from the start. Instead of an international program to build an experimental supersonic aircraft which might, or might not, be more of a blessing than a nuisance, there has been a race to capture whatever market exists for commercial SST's. As Congress considers once again whether to vote more money for the SST, it should raise the long neglected question of how to convert the commercial race into a technological experiment.

—LUTHER J. CARTER

NEWS IN BRIEF

● NATIONAL GROWTH POLICY:

American policy-makers must enlarge the criteria by which technological projects have been judged to include, for example, the environmental effects of technological change, according to a Presidential panel. The National Goals Research Staff, directed by the President's Special Consultant, Leonard Garment, has produced a report entitled *Toward Balanced Growth: Quantity with Quality*. The report examines the areas of population growth, environment, education, consumerism, technology assessment, basic natural science, economic choices, and balanced growth; it comes to few conclusions as to what ought to be done in these areas. Instead, the report outlines options open to policy-makers and discusses the advantages and disadvantages of various actions. The report generally emphasizes the need for long-range planning and for anticipating events rather than reacting to crises. Copies of the report may be obtained for \$1.50 from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

● **MERCURY POLLUTION:** Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel has telegraphed governors of 17 states warning that the federal government will bring suits against industries polluting waterways with mercury unless local action is taken swiftly. Vermont and Alabama, two of the states affected, have halted commercial fishing. Meanwhile, commercial fishermen have filed at least three lawsuits against plants for allegedly damaging the livelihood of fishermen, and the United Auto Workers is considering filing suit on the ground that halting fishing deprives union members of recreation.

● NSF AUTHORIZATION BILL:

Congress has sent to President Nixon a \$537.7 million authorization bill for the present fiscal year for the National Science Foundation (NSF). The bill, which sets a maximum on the amount which may be appropriated for NSF, exceeds the President's budget request by \$26.7 million. The largest addition by Congress was \$20 million for academic science projects transferred to NSF from mission agencies. The appropriations bill for NSF is currently in a House-Senate conference.