tives are said to have been undertaken with the support of Commoner. (Commoner was out of the country on an extended trip when this was written and was not available for comment.)

SIPI's new emphasis on the economic implications of environmental issues seems to have developed as a result of questions from legislators and industry asking whether increasing use of energy isn't needed to maintain high levels of employment.

Many of those involved in SIPI now see a backlash developing against "pure environmentalism." At a time of high unemployment, workers are particularly sensitive to environmental-protection actions which directly cost jobs. Commoner, among others, is credited with early recognition of this source of conflict and with seeking ways to come to terms with concern about unemployment.

While it is difficult to gauge the effectiveness of the science information movement, it does have a fairly impressive record of anticipating issues. There is little question that the movement helped to raise the public's consciousness about the dangers of fallout during the period of nuclear testing in the atmosphere by the Soviet Union and the United States and contributed significantly to debates such as that on civil defense policy during that era.

SIPI, however, was formed in 1963 after the Cuban missile crisis and about the time when the limited test ban treaty was concluded, so that the nuclear issue had lost some of its urgency. There was a question at that point of whether science information was not a single-issue movement that might wither away. The founders of SIPI argued that the responsibility of scientists to the public required that the movement should inform the public on a broader range of issues, including air and water pollution and the dangers of pesticide use. Their perspicacity was proved as the environmental movement gained momentum as the decade developed.

Generalizations about the science information movement are hazardous because local groups have had differing operating styles and principles. A basic tenet accepted by the founders of SIPI was that the organization should provide reliable scientific information but not attempt to influence decisions on particular public policy issues.

Local groups have not always followed that rule, in some cases campaigning openly on one side of an issue. Some leaders of SIPI, in fact, have also argued against the code of scientific neutrality, and the issue has been a source of chronic, apparently creative tension in the organization over the years.

A field test of the impartiality principle seems to be coming up again soon. Voters in the California primary in June will be deciding on the question of imposing fairly tight safety criteria on nuclear power plants, a question placed on the ballot by the initiative process (*Science*, 9 Jan.). SIPI opened a California office in December and will be active in the nuclear power debate. SIPI's annual national meeting is scheduled for 24 and 25 April in Berkeley, and it is organizing teach-ins on the nuclear power issue just preceding the meeting. McGowan says that the organization will not be taking a stand for or against nuclear power.

The nuclear issue has been a particularly important one to SIPI. Concern about the military and nonmilitary uses of nuclear energy have historically been

Briefing

NIH to Open Budget Sessions to Public

The National Institutes of Health (NIH), prodded by Congress, has agreed to open to the public previously closed portions of advisory committee meetings dealing with budget issues. Until now, most federal agencies have reluctantly complied with the letter of the Freedom of Information Act that was designed to expose the workings of government to the taxpayers. NIH has taken a step toward complying with the spirit of that law as well.

The Freedom of Information Act has been around since 1967, but it was not until 1972 that an executive order, and, subsequently, the Federal Advisory Committee Act, explicitly extended its provisions to federal advisory committees (*Science*, 4 August 1972). Then, a perceptible wave of panic swept through federal agencies as one bureaucrat after another predicted an end to the days when the government could get candid advice through its advisory systems. How on earth, they wondered, could public business be conducted in public? They concluded that it could not and hid behind an exemption that allowed them to close advisory meetings whenever money—and therefore substantive policy—was on the agenda. The explanation given for holding executive sessions under exemption 5 of the Freedom of Information Act was that the preparation of the President's budget is a privileged process and that any discussion of budgetary considerations, no matter how preliminary or general, could be construed as being part of that process.

Senator Lee Metcalf (D–Mont.), chairman of the Subcommittee on Reports, Accounting and Management has consistently taken issue with that narrow interpretation of the law. For the past few years, he and members of his subcommittee staff have quietly but persistently been pushing for reform and, with NIH for a start, it looks as though they finally may be gaining ground.

Following Senate hearings on advisory committees earlier this year, Metcalf wrote to NIH director Donald S. Fredrickson about closed meetings. He pointed out quite clearly that the particular exemption behind which agencies have been hiding refers to the confidentiality of "budget estimates and supporting materials submitted to" the Office of Management and Budget for preparation of the actual budget document the President submits to Congress each year. "It seems to me that these meetings should properly be opened to the public, if indeed they involve preliminary stages of budget development. . . ."

Within a week, Fredrickson replied that he agreed with the Senator. Fredrickson wrote that in the past the meetings had been closed because "we made a judgment that the rendering of advice on budgetary matters is an integral part of the decision-making process . . .," the "we" in this case not including Fredrickson who has been NIH director only since last July. (The fact that budget-making is integral to decision-making, of course, is precisely why it should not be conducted out of public earshot.) "Upon receipt of your letter," Fredrickson went on, "we have reviewed our decision. . . ."

Fredrickson personally favors greater openness and is, perhaps, the first high federal official to explicitly point out that the exemptions that have been used to justify closed meetings are discretionary, not mandatory. And so, as he wrote in his letter of 18 March, "from this time forward," most advisory meetings will be fully open when it comes to matters of the budget. Metcalf hopes to cite NIH's new posture as a precedent as he continues efforts to open up other federal agencies as well.—B.J.C.