

Of the shuttle missions currently planned for 1985, three will be in high inclination orbits that can match the Salyut. However, all three are Space-lab flights, and for technical reasons none of them is particularly suited to a Salyut rendezvous. On the other hand, the first launch of a shuttle from California's Vandenberg Air Force Base has now been postponed until early 1986, leaving a gap in the shuttle manifest that could be filled by a dedicated Salyut rendezvous mission.—**M. MITCHELL WALDROP**

Medical Institute to Sell Hughes Aircraft

Trustees of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, one of the largest private funders of medical research in the United States, decided on 10 January to put the Hughes Aircraft Company up for sale. The institute, which owns the giant electronics and aerospace company, could emerge from the sale with cash assets rivaling those of the Ford Foundation—the nation's largest foundation—and it may be required to sharply increase its outlays on research.

The institute was established by Howard Hughes in 1953 in part to provide a tax shelter for the company's profits. Its management was in dispute for many years after Hughes, who was the sole trustee, died in 1976. Last year, a Delaware court settled the matter by appointing a nine-member board to run the institute and decide what to do with the company.

One of the board's tasks has been to increase the funds flowing into research. It is required by tax law to spend an amount equivalent to 3.5 percent of its assets on research, but in spite of the fact that Hughes Aircraft—its only asset—had revenues of almost \$5 billion in 1983, the institute spent only \$51 million on research that year. It increased its research spending to \$80 million last year.

Last September, the board asked Morgan Stanley and Company to investigate the pros and cons of selling Hughes Aircraft, and at its January meeting, it decided to go ahead either with an outright sale or a public offering. The institute would then become

an independent medical research organization.

"We don't know what the result will be," says board president Donald Fredrickson, who is a former director of the National Institutes of Health. Industry analysts speculate, however, that the company will probably fetch between \$3 billion and \$4 billion. If so, the institute would be required to spend \$105 million to \$140 million a year on research. Fredrickson says there are no plans to depart from the current practice of funding a network of institutes on university campuses.

One unresolved question is whether the institute will eventually change its status from a medical research organization to a foundation. Such a switch, which has at times been pushed by the Internal Revenue Service, would require the organization to spend an amount equivalent to 5 percent of its assets each year. Fredrickson says the board is studying the matter, but is not currently planning to change.—**COLIN NORMAN**

Louisiana Judge Voids Creationism Law

Louisiana's balanced treatment act, which mandates equal teaching of so-called creation science and evolution in the state's public schools, has been ruled unconstitutional on First Amendment grounds by Federal judge Adrian Duplantier. The ruling, delivered in New Orleans on 10 January, was in response to a motion for summary judgment filed in September by the American Civil Liberties Union, which has been representing the law's critics in the tortuous legal wrangles that followed its enactment in July 1981.

Although the Louisiana creationism law had been deliberately drafted in somewhat vaguer terms than the version that was struck from Arkansas's statute book in January 1982 in an attempt to make it less vulnerable to legal challenge, Judge Duplantier's reasoning parallels precisely the Arkansas decision. "Because it [the state's balanced treatment law] promotes the beliefs of some theistic sects to the detriment of others, the statute violates the fundamental First Amendment principle . . . that a state must be neutral in its treatment of

religions," ruled Duplantier. Creationism, as incorporated in the balanced treatment law, was religion, not science, he added.

The law's supporters had filed more than 1000 pages of discussion in its defense, much of which focused on what exactly science is. Duplantier's response to this was blunt: "We decline the invitation to judge that debate." The state's attorney general, William Guste, says he will appeal Duplantier's decision and therefore hopes that a judge on the Fifth U.S. Circuit can be persuaded of the value of such a debate.—**ROGER LEWIN**

Academy to Reopen Soviet Exchange Program

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) has decided to try to reopen a formal U.S.-Soviet scientific exchange program, after a 4-year suspension. Toward that end, Frank Press, the Academy's president, will meet in Moscow on 21-22 January with a delegation from the Soviet Academy of Sciences, headed by A. P. Alexandrov, its president.

There, he will discuss a new umbrella agreement under which the academies might jointly sponsor scientific symposia. Prior to the suspension of the last agreement in 1980, after the Soviet Union sentenced Andrei Sakharov to internal exile, roughly three such symposia were held each year, each involving a dozen or so scholars. A portion of the agreement, under which the two academies help organize exchanges of individual scientists, has been observed informally for several years and is unlikely to be affected by the new negotiations.

A senior NAS official says that a major goal of the talks will be to ensure that the Soviet Union allows its most eminent scientists to participate in future symposia, so that the research establishments of both nations can benefit. "We're particularly interested in those areas where world-class research is clearly going on, such as mathematics," the official said. Hans Frauenfelder, a director of the NAS physics section, and Alexander Rich, a biochemist from MIT, are among those to accompany Press on the trip.—**R. JEFFREY SMITH**