Although AT&T wants to terminate Telpak, the GSA and other beneficiaries of the service are suing to prevent this. But, says a GSA spokesman, "We have to lay out plans as though AT&T will win the case." Consequently, the GSA has called for bids from such telecommunications carriers as Satellite Business Systems, Southern Pacific, MCI, and RCA Satellite to take over about one-quarter of the circuits now leased from AT&T. Although the GSA expects that other carriers will probably charge the government more for telephone service than AT&T now charges for Telpak, it also expects that the other carriers will charge less than AT&T will charge if Telpak is terminated. The GSA estimates that if Telpak is terminated and it stays with AT&T, it will have to pay an additional $120 million to $130 million each year.

Unlike the Telpak service, which makes use of conventional telephone lines, many of the other telecommunications carriers that may take over for AT&T use satellites and microwaves to transmit telephone messages. The GSA says, in its call for bids, that because "there will be occasions when unclassified, national security–related" information will be transmitted, encryption will be required for all satellite transmissions and for any microwave transmissions that pass through the Washington, D.C., New York, or San Francisco areas. This requirement for encryption follows from a classified presidential directive.

The method of encryption will be the Data Encryption Standard (DES), a controversial code designed several years ago by the National Bureau of Standards and IBM in consultation with the National Security Agency (NSA). The DES is the only code that the NSA has certified as secure for the protection of nonclassified government communications. But, since its development, critics have charged that the code can be broken.

So far, according to an industry source, sales of the DES have been slow. With the GSA's plans to give other companies much of the Telpak business, the source predicts that "a significant number of encryption boxes may be required." There will be a lot more interest in encryption equipment than there has been to date."

—Gina Bari Kolata

U.S. Scientists Protest Argentina Arrests

The arrest on 28 February of physicist José Westerkamp and several other leaders of the civil rights movement in Argentina aroused numerous protests from the American scientific community. At least six scientific societies dispatched telegrams expressing concern and urging the release of Westerkamp and his colleagues. Fourteen members of the House Committee on Science and Technology followed suit.

A week after the arrests were made, a judge ordered the activists to be released while charges against them are investigated. Some observers believe that the protests, from the United States and elsewhere, helped in getting Westerkamp and the others freed.

The arrests, which were ordered without formal charges, began with a raid on the Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS), a human rights organization in Buenos Aires. Police seized files containing information on 6000 people who have "disappeared" in Argentina in the past few years. They then arrested the Center's president, Emilio Mignone, a lawyer and former undersecretary for education; Augusto MacDonnell, a lawyer and president of the Argentine Permanent Assembly for Human Rights; Westerkamp; and three other activists.

All were held incommunicado until 4 March, when they were charged with unauthorized possession of maps of military installations, a charge they have categorically denied.

Of the activists arrested last week, Westerkamp is perhaps the best known outside Argentina. A respected physicist, he worked in the 1950's at Columbia University with Charles Townes, who subsequently won the Nobel Prize for his work on lasers. During the 1960's and 1970's, Westerkamp held various posts at the University of Buenos Aires, eventually becoming director of the microwave and laser laboratories.

Westerkamp became active in the human rights movement after his son, Gustavo, was arrested in 1975, tortured, and held in jail without charge or trial as a political prisoner. He has still not been released. Westerkamp's human rights work cost him his job—he was fired from his university post in May last year—and he has been working full-time at CELS for the past few months.

When news of the arrests reached the United States, protest telegrams were promptly dispatched by the National Academy of Sciences, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Physical Society, the American Statistical Association, the Canadian Committee of Scientists and Scholars, and the Federation of American Scientists.

On 4 March a majority of the members of the House subcommittee on science, research, and technology sent a telegram to Argentine President Jorge Videla expressing "deep concern" over the arrests and calling for the immediate release of Westerkamp and his colleagues. Subcommittee chairman Doug Walgren (D–Pa.) also said that he believes that the United States should use its assistance programs in science and technology to enhance the human rights of scientists in recipient countries.

—Colin Norman

Cetus Raises Record Sum in Stock Offering

Some of the bloom may have worn off the market for stocks in genetic engineering companies. Last week, Cetus Corporation, one of the largest of the new breed of biotechnology companies, sold 5 million shares to the public and raised some $120 million.

Although the share offering sold out, investors did not rush to buy a stake in the company quite as enthusiastically as they did last year when Genentech went public. Cetus shares were offered at $23 each, and they deviated little from that sum. In comparison, Genentech's shares soared from $35 to $89 in the first few minutes of trading. They are now selling at about $39.

In spite of the relatively cool response from investors, Cetus raised more money in its offering than any other new company in U.S. corporate history. That is not bad for a company that has yet to market its first product.

—Colin Norman