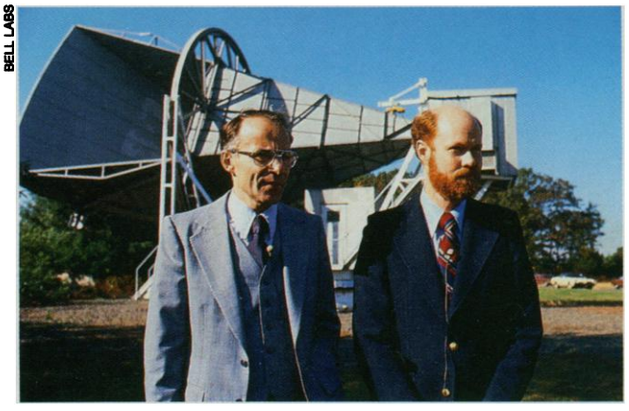
Bell Labs Radio Astronomy Another Casualty of Industrial Downsizing

■ The Nobel Prize–winning radio astronomy program at AT&T Bell Labs, renowned as the facility where scientists detected one of the first signs of the Big Bang, will soon be gone or transformed beyond recognition. This action, which began a year ago and neared completion last week with the departure of all but one of AT&T's radio astronomers, follows closely on the heels of Bellcore's decision to close its laboratory in high-temperature superconductivity (*Science*, 10 January, p. 147).

BELL LABS



Arno Penzias (left) *and Robert Wilson, with the Bell Labs horn antenna in happier times.*

Bell Labs has had an illustrious history in radio astronomy. In 1928, Karl Jansky came to investigate radio interference on phone lines and traced the source to an unearthly origin—the stars. Later, current radio astronomy director Robert Wilson and Arno Penzias, now the Labs' vice president for research, won a Nobel Prize for their 1965 discovery of the uniform background radio energy that floods the cosmos, thought to be a remnant of the Big Bang.

Now, however, the program "has largely come to an end," says Wilson, who is the only person still there. His last two radio astronomy colleagues recently moved on to academia, and Wilson says he's weighing his options within the lab.

Penzias and lab spokesman Robert Ford, however, insist that radio astronomy is only being "phased down" and "given less emphasis"—not closed altogether—because the equipment is aging and the need for satellite communication research is fading. AT&T will continue to support an optical astronomy project that will study gravitational lensing, Penzias says. "The world keeps changing. We have moved on to other things."

But another top AT&T executive, director of communications research Robert Lucky, finds the program's fate more disturbing. Lucky says the move is a sure sign that basic industrial research is becoming much harder to justify against the corporate bottom line. For instance, he notes, AT&T must compete with MCI, which spends nothing at all on research.

Gallo Aide in Trouble

■ The Justice Department is seeking to indict a former deputy to AIDS researcher Robert Gallo on charges that he took illegal payments from a drug company and lied on financial disclosure forms.

The target of this enforcement effort, Prem Sarin, was suspended from official duties at NIH in December 1990 as a result of an investigation by Representative John Dingell (D–MI). In a hearing last March, investigators from the General Accounting Office charged that Sarin had illegally tested drugs for two pharmaceutical companies in Gallo's lab and taken several steps to obscure the source of his income (*Science*, 15 March 1990, p. 1305). Sarin declined to testify at Dingell's hearing and has since refused comment.

Last week, Sarin turned down a chance at a plea agreement by refusing to enter a plea to a "criminal information," a set of charges filed by the U.S. Attorney in Baltimore, according to his lawyer. As a result, sources say, the U.S. Attorney will soon turn to the grand jury.

Good Advice

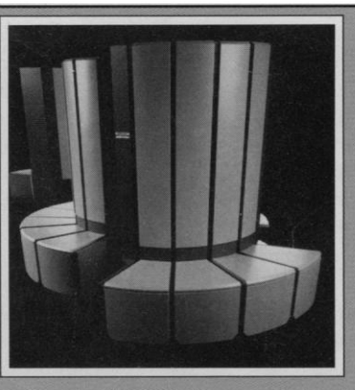
■ As reports from the National Research Council (NRC) go, *Intelligent Vehicle and Highway Technologies* may not make a big splash, but it does score well on the index of Washington insiderdom. The December 1991 report calls for a federal research program directed at the technologies necessary to design and build "smart" cars and highways, to be led jointly by the Department of Transportation and a private nonprofit group called IVHS America. Strangely enough, six of the 18 members of the NRC panel—including its chairman—also serve on leadership committees of IVHS America.

NRC study director Joseph Morris told *Science* he was unaware of the overlap, but said he didn't see anything unusual in it. He noted that the report didn't recommend giving IVHS America any control over federal funds, just a hand in advising the project. He also claimed that panel members agreed to endorse IVHS America at their last meeting in October 1990, well before some joined the organization's committees in February and March 1991. "The way I see it is as if a member of both organizations said the same thing twice," he said.

Teraflop Technology

■ Hoping to follow the lead of the high-energy physics community, structural biologists in academia and industry are banding together to try and snag funding for a Big Science project of their own: a teraflop computer.

PAUL SHAMBROOM



A teraflop computer would far outpace today's supercomputers, such as this Cray X-MP.

Such a supercomputer—capable of performing a trillion floating point operations per second—doesn't yet exist. But if you wave enough cash under a computer firm's nose, it will make one, says Paul Bash, a molecular biophysicist at Florida State University who does research at the Department of Energy's Supercomputer Computations Research Institute (SCRI) in Tallahassee. Earlier this week, SCRI hosted a workshop at which structural biologists discussed a proposal for a SCRI teraflop machine.

Bash says the structural biologists will need to persuade someone to plunk down about $100 million for a scalable, massively parallel computer that could solve protein structures and simulate enzyme reactions. From the beginning, Bash says, structural biologists have been "a group of very staunch individualists." But if they can work together to pull off this proposal, Bash predicts "a watershed period for us in the computational field."

EDITED BY DAVID P. HAMILTON