

Anti-'Star Wars' scientists on tour

by Stephanie Ezrol

A hastily assembled national tour "to draw a line in the heavens" against President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) was launched on Oct. 29 in Washington, D.C., at a poorly attended press conference held under the auspices of the Mondale-Ferraro campaign. Led by "pop"-scientist Carl Sagan, the group included Nobel Prize winning physicist Hans Bethe, Jeremy Stone of the Federation of American Scientists, and Henry Kendall of the Union of Concerned Scientists—all wringing their hands that the beam-weapon defense program would offend the Russians.

Kendall called the SDI "one of the most reprehensible actions of this administration." He enumerated four objections to the program, placing emphasis on the first, that "pursuit of the program would be seen as provocative." He charged that the Soviets would perceive the United States as trying to get a first-strike capability, and would meet that challenge with a "fierce response." At no time did Kendall acknowledge that the Soviets not only have their own space-based weapon program, but are acknowledged to be 10 years ahead of the United States.

Secondly, Kendall charged that, faced with "devastating counter-measures," the SDI program would not work because of overwhelming technical difficulties. And the Soviets, he said, would be forced to respond with a huge offensive buildup. He claimed, thirdly, that the SDI "is the enemy of arms control." Finally, he asserted that the program, at an overall cost of \$1 trillion, is too expensive.

Next Dr. Bethe spoke, emphasizing that the strategic defense program "isn't going to work," according to his own calculations, and when he looked at the classified Fletcher Commission report on the outlook for the program, he found nothing to refute his own evaluation.

The fact sheet distributed by the Mondale campaign reiterated this claim, evoking "expert" opinion to prove that, for antiballistic-missile defense to be achieved, "at least eight technical problems must be solved . . . each problem equal to or greater than the Manhattan Project that created the atomic bomb or the Apollo project that put a man on the moon."

But it was Jeremy Stone's testimony that epitomized the

irrational approach the Mondale campaign has used in trying to attack the SDI. Stone told reporters: "You don't have to be a scientist like Hans Bethe to know that the system would not work to create a perfect defense. A child of 10 could tell you that."

Then Carl "Nuclear Winter" Sagan reported that last December a proposal was made at the United Nations to ban weapons in space, and it was approved by 147 to 1, the one being the United States. Sagan claimed that 1) the defense shield should be opposed because it would never be 100% effective; 2) the cost would be too great; 3) it would abrogate the ABM treaty; 4) it would only defend the United States, and therefore would unravel our alliances; 5) it would encourage a Soviet pre-emptive strike.

During the question period, an *EIR* reporter asked the "Star Wars Brigade" "experts" to explain several blatant inconsistencies in their logic: If they admit, for instance, that "at least eight technical problems have to be solved," then how can they claim the system is impossible; and, if it is impossible, how could it provoke a first strike; and if the technology would not work, why would Mondale be so upset at President Reagan's offer to share the technology with the Soviets? Answering for the group, Jeremy Stone said the system "would not be effective enough to work, but would be effective enough to start up a new arms race."

A last-ditch effort

The anti-Star Wars tour was part of the Mondale campaign's 11th-hour drive, during the last weeks before the presidential election, to sow Moscow's disinformation about the Strategic Defense Initiative. Said a Mondale campaign spokesman at the Washington press conference: "The tour only came together within the last few days. We always wanted to do it . . . but it just came together quickly. We don't even have the last days of the tour solid yet. It's just that everyone got truly appalled by Reagan's comments in the second debate. That really ignited the scientific community. It was clear that Reagan didn't even know what the program was about. Even people in Reagan's administration agreed that the system won't work."

Following the Washington press conference, the tour hit Atlanta, Nashville, Louisville, St. Louis, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, and New York City.

Despite advice to Mondale that his head-on attack against "Star Wars" was backfiring as a vote-getting tactic, the candidate aired television advertisements portraying President Reagan as a war-mongering maniac who would blow up the world if re-elected. Counterposing film clips of children playing to shots of nuclear missiles in flight, the ads were modeled on Lyndon Johnson's 1964 ad which depicted Barry Goldwater as a man ready to launch Armageddon. LBJ's ad may have contributed to Goldwater's defeat, but today the polls show that the vast majority of the population supports the Strategic Defense Initiative.