

Fighting for Space

"Part of our purpose," said Cornell astronomer **Carl Sagan**, "is to prove to the government that planetary exploration is popular." His audience, which included such confirmed space enthusiasts as science fiction writer **Isaac Asimov**, former Jet Propulsion Laboratory director **Bruce Murray**, National Academy of Sciences president **Frank Press**, and Hungarian plasma physicist **Tamas Gombosi**, did not need proof. They were gathered at a banquet given by the Planetary Society to commemorate the 20th anniversary of mankind's first successful interplanetary mission, the fly-by of Venus by Mariner 2 on December 14, 1962.

The Planetary Society, a nonprofit organization with more than 100,000 members, hopes to revitalize the languishing U.S. space program. Sagan, its president, is convinced that the public has already demonstrated its enthusiasm for space ventures. Said he, "You would have to be made of wood not to want to know what is out there." Thus, he thinks, it is only a matter of time—and some determined lobbying—

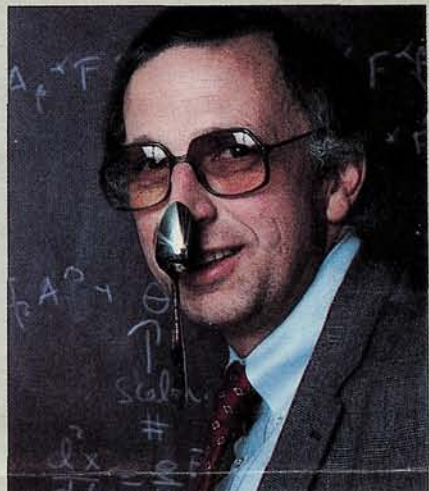
before government money follows. Sagan stressed that, beyond satisfying curiosity, planetary missions can provide a better understanding of the earth. Mariner 2, for example, showed that Venus suffers from the "greenhouse effect," which causes temperatures to soar to the melting point of lead. Mars, on the other hand, is deep in an ice age. "Something has happened on Mars and Venus," Sagan said, and something similar might happen on earth.

Asimov agreed: "The more we know about earth, the more we can do to survive." He was less optimistic about America's space future. "It's disgraceful, but apparently we need a Soviet space spectacular to get us moving."

That spectacular may well be the U.S.S.R.'s forthcoming Venera mission, a probe that will fly by Venus and then rendezvous with Halley's comet in 1986. Gombosi, who has the distinction of having been an adviser to both the U.S. Pioneer and Soviet Venera missions, pointed out that the Venus-Halley probe represents the combined effort of eight nations, and pleaded for "more international interaction in space exploration."

Sagan eloquently summed up the creed of the Planetary Society: "The hallmark of our time on earth is that we set foot into space. That is as significant as man coming down from the trees. If humans survive the decades ahead, then others will look back, and well may envy us for the time in which we live. That was the time it all started."

Press, Gombosi, Asimov, and Sagan celebrate the 20th anniversary of Mariner 2



Field does his spoon trick

A New Spoonerism?

In his nine and a half years as director of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, **George Field** ably demonstrated that he had a nose for quasars, spiral galaxies, and supernovas. At a farewell party thrown for him at Harvard in December, the retiring director further displayed his nasal versatility.

Field is the chairman of the 21-member Astronomy Survey Committee responsible for the 1982 "Field Report," which set financing priorities in astronomy. The committee members have something in common aside from their interest in celestial matters: they all practice the arcane art of spoon dangling. "It's utter trivia," Field explains. "You just put the spoon part toward the nose, then let it hang down, and it stays there as if by magic." But, he warns, the spoon must be properly hung. "It has to be heavy enough to pull the flesh of the nose down, thereby creating a little friction."

Field admits that, as popular as the spoon-dangling fad is with his committee members, it has not caught on like skateboards or the Hula Hoop: "It certainly isn't something that's spread like wildfire. I'm fifty-three years old, and I've never seen any other group with spoons on their noses." The reason may be the snooty attitude of some of his critics. "My secretary says I look like a fool," Field admits. "Nevertheless, I think there's some benefit in the director of the Center for Astrophysics looking like a fool. It lightens things up." □