

Snoopy's Brothers

It may seem churlish, at a time when part of Virgil's glimpse of the promised land—"tuus iam regnat Apollo"—seems to be within our grasp, to make a critical assessment of some of NASA's other activities and perhaps those of its Russian counterpart. But some awkward questions need posing now to try and avoid future troubles. We all know that up there somewhere, Russian and American satellites keep a big brotherly eye on the world beneath. A vast volume of data must be accumulating, for it is probable that a ground resolution of 3 to 4 metres is available. The temptation to spell out a four letter word to send to Moscow and Washington by careful mowing of the grass of Wembley Stadium is one that some wag ought not to be able to resist.

It is arguable that these other Snoopies contribute significantly to preventing tensions in international politics, as may also the aerial-infested Russian trawlers and their even less ambiguous American counterparts. It will be for some future historian to assess the effect of improved reconnaissance in the fifties and sixties, but there can be little doubt that the knowledge that nothing is unobserved and everything monitored diminishes empty sabre rattling. Arms control is viewed in a different light since the advent of high grade reconnaissance. The issue of inspection, once the stumbling block of East-West negotiations, seems to have been regarded as less important during the recent overtures on strategic arms limitation talks. Nor does it seem to be a major issue in the debates on sea bed armaments. The fact that inspection is still regarded as a vital requirement in a comprehensive test ban probably tells more about political postures than monitoring capabilities.

Viewed in the framework of a balance between the United States and Soviet Union with no other power in the same league, reconnaissance satellites may well be valuable peacekeepers. But what would happen if satellite information spread beyond the super-powers? There is no evidence, say, that Russia sends photographs of interest to Cuba, or Egypt, or Somalia. The possibility is not negligible, however, and the danger of amateur interpretations sparking off local conflicts cannot be ruled out. Aficionados of the comic strip Peanuts will recall that, spurred on by Lucy, the luckless Charlie Brown was able only to see a "ducky and a horsie" in cloud formations while the precocious Linus managed a map of British Honduras, the profile of Thomas Eakins, sculptor and painter, and an impression of the stoning of Stephen with the Apostle Paul standing to one side. Need more be said?

Unfortunately, yes. Recently the Earth Resources Technology Satellite (ERTS) was formally unveiled in the United Kingdom, and potential users will no doubt be subjected to an increasingly "hard-sell" in the next year or two. We will be warned that this is something we cannot afford to miss, and that those who cannot raise any enthusiasm for it are out of touch. Certainly it has potentialities for the imaginative thinker, as pointed out last week in *Nature* (page 817). In an ideal world, ERTS might do no harm and possibly a lot of good. In the real world, the position is a little less clear. Some awkward questions have to be asked and answered, and although few have addressed their minds to them so far, it seems desirable that they should be reiterated until all members of the scientific community are aware at least of the questions, if not of the answers.

To whom will the photographs belong? Pictures shown so far have been liberally distributed, but obvi-

Retire Early in Brazil

THERE is great anxiety among European scientists about the consequences of some of the latest moves of the military government in Brazil against the universities and, in particular, against members of university faculties who have not openly declared themselves in favour of the regime. Matters have been brought to a head by a special decree which allows some professors to be retired compulsorily before the normal age. Quite apart from the fact that such action prevents them from playing a further part in university life, a great many of them have also to live on pensions which may be as little as one-quarter of their normal salaries.

Altogether, sixty-eight professors have been affected by this decree and among these are included three internationally known physicists working in theoretical studies of elementary particles. They are Professors J. Leite Lopes, Mario Schemberg and Jayme Tiomno. Although Professor Schemberg is only two years from retirement, Professors Lopes and Tiomno are in mid-career. In these and other cases, there is a chance that employment outside Brazil would allow active scientists to remain productive. On the face of things, nothing which can be done from the outside could soften the blow to Brazilian science which the decree will deliver.

Suggestions for help should be sent in confidence to the Editor of *Nature*.