

NEW WORLD

Second Crusade Begins to Move

by our Washington Correspondent

THIS year's health research crusade was quietly launched last week on Capitol Hill. Identical bills calling for expenditures of \$1,290 million over the next three years in a "national attack on diseases of the heart and blood vessels, lungs and blood" were introduced into the Senate by Edward M. Kennedy and into the House of Representatives by Paul G. Rogers. If enacted unchanged, the bills would almost double the present rate of expenditure on such diseases by 1976, and the money envisaged for 1973 alone is some \$115 million more than President Nixon requested in his budget message.

Those who were predicting last year that the National Heart and Lung Institute would not be far behind the National Cancer Institute in the competition for funds and public attention, therefore seem to have been close to the mark. Indeed, the arguments for increasing federal expenditure on diseases of the heart and lungs are perhaps more compelling and almost as politically appealing as those that were advanced last year for injecting more money into cancer research. For do they not account for more than half the deaths each year in the United States? And it will be doubly difficult for both Congress and the Administration to oppose such expenditure in an election year.

The arguments for increased efforts to combat diseases of the lungs and circulatory system cannot, however, be passed off merely as election year political rhetoric. Last year, for example, a committee of scientists appointed by Dr Theodore Cooper, Director of the National Heart and Lung Institute, recommended a greatly expanded federal programme to combat arteriosclerosis (see *Nature*, 234, 435; 1971) on the basis that the very high incidence of the disease in the United States may be cut down by improved screening and educational services. Moreover, unlike cancer, many of the underlying causes of diseases of the lungs and blood vessels are relatively well understood, and investments are therefore more likely to bring greater success in terms of reducing the incidence of such diseases.

Mr Paul Rogers suggested last week, for example, that if his bill is enacted, the number of deaths from heart attacks and strokes might be reduced by up to 30 per cent in five to seven years. And Dr Charles K. Friedberg, a member of

the task force on arteriosclerosis, said, when that report was released, that if Americans were prepared to alter their dietary habits and to stop smoking, the incidence of arteriosclerosis in the United States may be reduced by as much as 90 per cent.

The chief provision in the Kennedy-Rogers bill is the expenditure that it calls for. The bill embodies few major changes in either the organization of the National Heart and Lung Institute or in the programmes that it administers. In short, what the bill calls for is the setting up of a national heart, blood vessel, lung and blood disease programme, on the lines of the cancer programme, embodying research into the epidemiology, aetiology and prevention of cardiovascular and lung diseases, the establishment of new diagnostic and treatment centres and educational programmes.

The programme would be reviewed by Congress each year, thereby establishing some measure of Congressional control over the National Heart and Lung Institute. There is also provision for the setting up of fifteen new clinical research and training centres, and the present National Heart Advisory Council would be replaced by an advisory board consisting of twenty-two members appointed by the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, on the lines of the newly created National Advisory Cancer Board. Also borrowed from the cancer legislation is the suggestion that all grants of less than \$35,000 could be approved by the director of the institute after peer review, but without going before the advisory board.

Mercifully, the bills do not require that research into heart and lung diseases should be taken out of the hands of the National Institutes of Health so that, unlike the past year's debate on cancer research, arguments about the merits of increasing expenditures on research and treatment will not become sidetracked by wrangles over important administrative arrangements. The National Heart and Lung Institute would, moreover, have less independence under the terms of this bill than the National Cancer Institute now has, for there is no suggestion that its budget should be separated from that of the rest of the National Institutes of Health. The expenditures being asked for are \$370 million in 1973, \$430 million in 1974 and \$480 million in 1975.

The importance of these two bills, compared with the rash of other legislation concerned with funding for research into heart and lung diseases, is that they have been introduced by the two most influential Congressmen in health matters—Rogers is chairman of the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Public Health and Environment, and Kennedy is chairman of the Health Subcommittee of the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee—and they have also been co-sponsored by a majority of members of the respective subcommittees. It is also a welcome sign that Kennedy and Rogers, who have in the past been at odds over the cancer legislation and over bills concerned with drug abuse control, have cooperated on this legislation.

The Administration has also declared its interest in supporting such research and treatment. President Nixon mentioned in his State of the Union message that he is soon to appoint a task force to see what needs to be done at the federal level in supporting such activities, and this commitment was reiterated in his health message to Congress last month. Officials of the National Heart and Lung Institute, although reserving their judgment on the Kennedy-Rogers bill, are understandably happy about the attention the institute is receiving. One official also pointed out last week that provision of extra funds, and especially some loosening of the present restrictions on hiring manpower, will help the institute to build up its own in-house research capabilities.

OCEAN MAMMALS

A Five Year Reprieve

by our Washington Correspondent

CENTURIES of unfettered killing, motivated by commercial greed, have driven one species of whale after another to the verge of extinction. And there is now mounting concern that other varieties of ocean mammals, such as some species of seals and polar bears, are following their marine relatives down the slippery slope to the point at which they can no longer survive. It is therefore no surprise that in the United States, where conservationists have a particularly strong voice and a hefty political punch, public anger has finally forced the federal government to take strong and urgent steps to remedy the situation.