The Myth That Killed The SST

WASHINGTON — Beware the scholarly scientist who will defile his credentials to score a partisan victory, hoping he won’t be found out.

It happened; he won. He did more than anyone else to persuade Congress to kill the American supersonic aircraft by assembling his “scientific evidence” to prove that a fleet of SSTs would spread skin cancer all over the world. No wonder Congress backed away from continuing the production of the controversial SST! How could Congress be expected to take the rap for legislating skin disease?

But it now develops that there was no scientific evidence to show that supersonic planes or high-flying subsonic planes would do any of the horrible things some said they would — and said it with a great show of objective credibility.

The myths have outrun the facts for years.

Anthony J. Broderick, who has been in charge of the high-altitude pollution study for the Federal Aviation Administration, put it this way in a recent address before the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics:

“During the widely publicized public debate which culminated in the withdrawal of federal financial support for the development of a commercial supersonic transport [SST], Prof. James McDonald pointed out that a small reduction in average atmospheric ozone concentration would be expected to lead to an increase in the incidence of skin cancer.”

Professor McDonald was avoiding the real point at issue. He had no evidence that supersonic flight could cause a small reduction in the ozone and thereby could cause skin cancer. This was the myth that killed the SST.

AND NOW Broderick’s studies prove that there was no accurate scientific evidence to support these fears — and never had been. He reports that “for the first time we can state that it is questionable whether emissions from ‘Concorde-type’ SSTs reduce ozone at all.”

The scientists who were successfully campaigning against the American SST could rightly say at the time they were generating their crusade there was yet no conclusive proof that the SSTs might not increase skin cancer. But that was not what they were saying. They were saying that SSTs were a proven danger and, therefore, ought not be allowed to be built, even on an experimental basis.

There was no such evidence, and the scientists who were spreading these fears were misusing their credentials as scientists to advance their partisan views.

Washington correspondents know that these pseudo-scientific forecasts impressed Congress so much that it refused even to fund the two SST prototypes so that their potential for good or harm could be completely tested.

Broderick can now assure us that “there is no imminent threat of ozone reduction” from any type of existing aircraft.

I repeat: Beware the partisan advocate concealed in scientist’s clothing.

Supersonic Transport

106/Don Heath
115/Jack Van Hoss
115/Herbert Parker
116/Rob Rower
249/Francis McLean
100/Bill Brooks
241/Roger Anderson
462/Henry Kurgan (Noise articles)
430/Hubert Clark
154/G. Price
154/Dr. Mehrens