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The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour

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HEADLINE: Economy in '85: What's Ahead?;
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BYLINE: In New York: ROBERT MacNEIL, Executive Editor; CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT, Correspondent; In Washington: JIM LEHRER, Associate Editor; Guests In New York: SAUL HYMANS, Economic Forecaster; NAT HENTOFF, Journalist; PAUL KURTZ, State University of New York; In Washington: REED IRVINE, Accuracy in Media; In San Francisco: MARTIN EBON, Parapsychologist; Reports from NewsHour Correspondents: ALLAN POWELL (BBC), Northumberland, England; KWAME HOLMAN, in San Francisco

BODY:

INTRO

JIM LEHRER: Good evening. In the headlines this Tuesday the federal government indicted Tennessee banker Jake Butcher for bank fraud. Investors in WPPSS, the big Pacific Northwest power company, sued for a record \$7.25 billion, and the United States claimed, and Nicaragua confirmed, the Sandinistas have received helicopters and other arms from the Soviet Union, but no jet fighters. Robin?

MacNEIL: Here's our NewsHour rundown tonight. First, the news of the day, then our newsmaker interview with the economist named forecaster of the year. In our first focus section we examine the press in two big libel suits now on trial. Then a documentary report on so-called Type A personality: does it cause heart attacks? And our final focus section looks at psychic phenomena: could they play a role in the nation's defense?

LEHRER: The second term of Ronald Reagan began today, unofficially, at least. Mr. Reagan, re-elected in stunning fashion a week ago today, was back at the White House and his first task of the day was to welcome Grand Duke Jean of Luxembourg and his wife. Luxembourg is a tiny, tiny country in Western Europe. Its population is just 365,000. But it's a loyal NATO ally, and the Duke and Mr. Reagan both recalled today how U.S. troops liberated Luxembourg from the Nazis in World War II. Later in the day Mr. Reagan held his first cabinet meeting since the election. Later in the week Mr. Reagan is to make some initial decisions on budget cuts designed to reduce the federal deficit, and later in this program we'll hear some thoughts on that and related subjects from the man today named economic forecaster of the year. Robin?

MacNEIL: The Nicaragua crisis. The Pentagon said today the United States would be prepared to provide military assistance to El Salvador and Honduras should they face an invasion by Nicaragua. Chief Pentagon spokesman Michael Burch in a briefing acknowledged that the Pentagon had no hard evidence that Nicaragua planned to invade any of its neighbors, but he added:

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HOLMAN [Voice-over]: In spite of all the skepticism about Type A behavior, Dr. Friedman is philosophical. He's confident that future studies will prove he was right.

Dr. FRIEDMAN: I don't mind. The thing that I like is I know long after I'm dead it's going to hold up, that when 2000 rolls around it might not be called Type A behavior, but they will know that we had something to do with linking the mind to the heart.

HOLMAN [voice-over]: John Vaccarello, for one, is already convinced. He believes the advice has improved his life and changed it forever.

Mr. VACCARELLO: I don't think I changed my personality. I don't think you can ever do that. I'm not sure anybody can. But what I did is change my behavior and how I react to certain things. I'm a recovering Type A, if you will. I have to be always on guard.

MacNEIL: Tomorrow Dr. Friedman will be talking about ways to change Type A behavior at the annual meeting of the American Heart Association in Miami.

Now to an area of science where believers confront skeptics also. Charlayne Hunter-Gault has our next focus section. Charlayne?

Psychic Warfare

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: Robin, the debate is over something called parapsychology or the science of psychic phenomena. It is an open secret that both the United States and the Soviet Union have sponsored research into things like ESP, extrasensory perception, to see if there is any military use for such phenomena. For example, proponents say we may be able to use mental telepathy to send messages to submerged submarines, which are often difficult to reach by standard methods. Along the same lines, the theory goes, we might be able to use psychokinesis, the power to mentally move objects to sabotage the enemy -- for example, jamming their computers from a safe distance away. And there's also some research into what's known as remote viewing, trying to mentally picture something that's far away, like detecting where the enemy's missiles are hidden. At a conference of scientists this weekened in Palo Alto, California, the debate was intense, albeit a little uneven. The only true believer to emerge was Martin Ebon, a parapsychologist and the author of a book on the Soviet research into the field. He joins us tonight from public station KQED in San Francisco. Mr. Ebon, what does it mean to be true believer? Does it mean that all the things I've just outlined are things that you believe are correct?

MARTIN EBON: I would think that of the three things you outlined, two of them are exaggerations. The idea of doing things drastically by telekinesis is still, I think, in the realm of science fiction. The remote viewing hypothesis, I think that is much more fundamentally correct. And what was the first one on your list? I don't recall. I looked at it --

HUNTER-GAULT: Looking to telepathy to find submerged submarines and so on.

Mr. EBON: That, of course, is something that has interested the Soviet Union particularly, and of course it interests us, too, because they cannot reach submerged submarines by wireless, by radio. But, again, the experiments, such as they have been, I think on both sides of the Atlantic, certainly in the

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Soviet Union, as far as know, and I concentrate on the Soviet Union, have not been -- had any breakthroughs. We'll have to let these exploratory things go on, and then I think we can see whether there is something drastic that has happened.

HUNTER-GAULT: But you do believe that there is a psychic arms race going on?

Mr. EBON: No, I think -- well, psychic arms race is again one of these exaggerated terms. Parallel psychical research is being done in the Soviet Union under other terms. They, for instance, refer to telepathy as biocommunications. They call psychokinesis psychotronics. And this has been going for 20 years or more, since 1960, certainly. And I wouldn't call it a psychic arms race. I think that's a sort of tabloid sensationalism. And to the degree that I am a true believer, I am a true believer in keeping calm about all these thing. I don't believe in being hysterical or, for that matter, phlegmatic. There's a middle ground.

HUNTER-GAULT: I understand. You just said that you specifically concentrate on the Soviets. What specifically have they done in this area that might have military applications?

Mr. EBON: Well, virtually anything in this field and many other field that has civilian application also has military application. They have been interested in animal experiments and in human experiments. For instance, they have made experiments between Moscow and Leningrad and other Soviet cities using telepathists and trying very hard to do something which I think is very imaginative, but also rather risky, namely, to enhance the telepathic power of individuals and at the same time direct the telepathic power to concentrate it, to control it. And that in something as elusive as telepathy is a tremendously difficult job. But they have shown themselves, what shall I say, quite unrigid, remarkably unrigid for a society that on the whole tends to be erring on the side of rigidity.

HUNTER-GAULT: The example you just gave, now, what kind of military application would you see that having?

Mr. EBON: Well, again, telepathy from human being to human being might have application precisely in this area, namely, let's say, shore point to submarine. If you have a telepathic receiver on the submarine and somebody at the shore point you might then very well communicate at least a code word. The whole thing started in 1960 when a French magazine called Science et vie published a hoax article which alleged that the United States had done a very successful telepathy experiment from Friendship, Maryland, to the U.S. nuclear submarine Nautilus under the polar ice cap. This was, of course, an error. This was not just an error, it was a hoax. But I alerted the Russians, and ever since then they have been very curious and they have made experiments with rabbits. They have made experiments with other animals to see whether something can be created in terms of emotions. And emotion seems to be the driving force when it comes to telepathic transmission.

HUNTER-GAULT: All right, well, Mr. Ebon, we'll come right back. Robin?

MacNEIL: To the extent that he's a believer Mr. Ebon was in the minority at that weakened conference in California, because it was sponsored by a group of scientists who are skeptical about psychic phenomena. They call themselves

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the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. Their chairman is Paul Kurtz, a professor of philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Professor Kurtz, what is it you are skeptical of?

PAUL Prof. KURTZ: Well, I'm skeptical about these great claims about a psychic breakthrough or even about ESP. Incidentally, Robin, we did invite many other believers to the conference. There have been three books this past year which have built this up -- Mr. Ebon's book is one of the books -- And the other people declined. But in any case there has not been a critical examination of the so-called psychic arms race. I think it's the media arms race because I think it involved a great deal of hoopla, exaggeration and wishful thinking.

MacNEIL: Well, Mr. Ebon said that there isn't a psychia arms race and to say so is very exaggerated. He isn't claiming that there is.

Prof. KURTZ: No. Yes, but in the past year there has been a great number of claims. I think that Mr. Ebon on that point is more moderate though his own book on psychic warfare helped to contribute to this kind of intense public interest. But this borderlines on science fiction and science fantasy.

MacNEIL: Do you believe the Pentagon is spending money in this area of research?

Prof. KURTZ: The Pentagon has denied that. The estimates have been that they are spending \$6 million a year. I don't know. I think they're probably spending something. But if they really thought that there was a psychic potential, the amount that they are spending is about one penny in every thousand dollars that is being spent on the total defense budget.

MacNEIL: Do you object to their spending it?

Prof. KURTZ: I really object to the public being misled in this. I think --

MacNEIL: How is the public being misled?

Prof. KURTZ: In thinking that there is some kind of mystical or mysterious way, some formulae in which we will break through, put up a psychic arms shield, for example, stop incoming missiles. I think we need an intelligent debate of defense policies. So that is what I've objected to. On the long shot that there may be something there, I have no objection to research going on. But research has been going on for one century, 102 years, actually, and the results as far as we can see are nil.

MacNEIL: What is the objective of your organization? To stop this research?

Prof. KURTZ: No, we have an open mind. We believe in continuing inquiry into claims. People are interested in ESP, telepathy, remote viewing, psychokinesis, and we're willing to examine that. We think it should be examined. However, on the basis of our inquiry thus far, we think that has not been proven. There is no replicable evidence that shows that you can do the kind of things that Mr. Ebon suggested might be done, that you can by telepathy transmit messages.

MacNEIL: You don't doubt that these phenomena exist -- telepathy, ESP and so on? It's just their application and the extent of their application you're skeptical of?

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Prof. KURTZ: No, I doubt that they exist. Oh, yes.

MacNEIL: You doubt that any of these phenomena exist?

Prof. KURTZ: Yes. There's a large body of scientific opinion, probably the majority of scientists are very skeptical about this. Because when you take it in the laboratory in the U.S. -- and I'm most familiar with what has happened in the West. If you take it into the laboratory and you try to examine it under controlled conditions it becomes very, very difficult to test it. There has been no replicable test that stands up under rigorous scrutiny.

MacNEIL: Isn't it -- doesn't it go against scientific tradition for a scientist to organize another group of scientists to oppose or to professionally express skepticism about a whole area of research? If there isn't proof, why isn't your encouragement to let them go ahead and try and find out?

Prof. KURTZ: No, I'm not interested in opposing. I think that what has happened is that there is a great deal of propaganda in favor of so-called psychic phenomena. Not only do you have a Defense Department allegedly using it, you have psychic detectives. In the United States today many, many people believe that there is such a thing as superpsychics. And so it seems to me that there ought to be a kind of balanced and careful examination of the evidence. And so our committee is interested in doing that. We've been examining the evidence, and we find that there is no evidence for psychic phenomena.

MacNEIL: Thank you. Charlayne?

HUNTER-GAULT: What about that, Mr. Ebon?

Mr. EBON: Well, I am always impressed with the fact that a man like Professor Kurtz tends to lump together what is actually a very serious endeavor to look into the bottom of these elusive things with charlatanism. There is a sort of joke going around in our circles, which goes something like, "I am a scientist, you are a charlatan and he is a gullible fool." And making this distinction gets to be a little bit dicey. And Professor Kurtz, I'm afraid, has a tendency to put us all into one pot when he talks about psychic detectives. Well, this is peripheral and marginal stuff. And I'm afraid there are, of course, people in every field -- that includes, I'm afraid, medicine and the law and journalism -- who are subject to exaggeration and to money-grubbing. And nobody has a monopoly on this, and certainly there are some charming psychics who may do a great deal of good and who do it without asking for money.

HUNTER-GAULT: Let me just ask Mr. Kurtz. Is that what you're doing? You're lumping them all and judging them all accordingly?

Prof. KURTZ: No we do make a distinction, and I would want to urge this, between careful parapsychological or experimental research on the one hand and charlatans and the gullibility on the part of the public on the other.

HUNTER-GAULT: But you did say that Mr. Ebon's work was helping to contribute to what you called the science fiction fantasy --

Prof. KURTZ: I think so, having read his book and having read some of the exaggerations and his indicating that you might be able by means of telepathy communicate with a submarine under sea. I think that has gone far beyond what

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we're able to do in the open laboratory today.

HUNTER-GAULT: What's wrong with that, Mr. Ebon?

Mr. EBON: Well, there's nothing wrong with Professor Kurtz's skepticism. I'm all for it because I believe in a free society. I merely don't like, what shall I say, the kind of thing that you were discussing earlier when you were discussing the dangers of libel law, of putting a chill on things. And people get afraid of doing things that are unorthodox for fear of being called engaging in voodoo warfare or something that gets them in the Jack Anderson column and gets exaggerated. The tabloids have done us a great injustice, the sensationalist tabloids, in always playing up these exaggerated claims. And I'm afraid my colleagues who do serious research have become terribly gunshy, which is one reason why they didn't turn up at Professor Kurtz's conference, which I must say was in many ways a very fair and fascinating conference and I'm very glad I was there

HUNTER-GAULT: But, I mean, isn't he correct in his call for more replicable scientific evidence of your claims? I mean, he says there's no evidence, for example, of your claim that you can have this telepathic communication? I mean, is he wrong to ask for some kind of evidence that can be demonstrated in a lab?

Mr. EBON: He is totally right. So are all parapsychologists who have the same viewpoint who want replicable experiments and as a matter of fact, speaking of my book, which he says has sort of contributed to this sensationalization, it's called Psychic Warfare -- Threat or Illusion? And I'm being very careful in making claims for it either being a threat -- there are illusions on both sides of the Iron Curtain, but there are illusions in many other fields -- psychosomatic medicine and psychology and so forth. We have to have a right to our illusions. We mustn't be unimaginative in fields that are as, what shall I say, as delightful and fascinating as this one.

Prof. KURTZ: Not when you enter into public policy and you talk about important things like national defense. Surely we don't want illusions about that. I would hate to think that the makers of policy in this country, people in the Congress and so on, will operate on illusions. To imagine that the mind is able, for example, to put up a psychic shield. There are some people who have suggested that a psychic can throw up a time warp and that incoming Russian missiles can explode in the past and perhaps kill dinosaurs. Of course, that's the extreme point --

Mr. EBON: You see, there you go again, to coin a phrase.

Prof. KURTZ: You've read that in Jack Anderson and many of the columns and another book written in the past year has made that point. But I think, Charlayne, it's very important that there be careful scientific research. We mustn't dismiss any claim to knowledge. And the point about parapsychology, after 100 years it's so full of holes, chicanery and fraud too, that I would urge great caution.

HUNTER-GAULT: And you don't think that your position is having the chilling effect that Mr. Ebon discussed -- not just caution and more care but a chilling effect on the research?

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Prof. KURTZ: I would hope not. You know, we're a small group of scientists. Ranged against us are hundreds and hundreds of publications and of organizations committed to the belief in the paranormal. And the paranormal has become almost a religion in America today, where people merely accept it as true without any kind of data for it. And I think we need data, we need experiment, we need verification.

HUNTER-GAULT: Mr. Ebon, you briefly wanted to make a point in response?

Mr. EBON: Well, the fascination with the paranormal, the involvement with the paranormal I think was a great thing in the decade from 1965 to 1975. Since then I think things have calmed down a great deal, and any responsible parapsychologist would welcome this so they can work quietly without the attention that would sensationalize it. And in many ways I think we might be grateful for Professor Kurtz to have brought, under the label of the psychic arms race, this whole thing down into the foreground again. It has given us a new chance of public attention.

HUNTER-GAULT: All right, well, Mr. Ebon, we're grateful for your participation, and yours as well, Mr. Kurtz. Thank you. Jim?

LEHRER: Again the major stories of this day.

Tennessee banker Jake Butcher was indicted.

Investors in the Northwest power company called WPPSS filed a record \$7.25-billion lawsuit against Washington state officials.

And there are reports a deal has been struck to get troops withdrawn from southern Lebanon, the deal between Israel and Lebanon.

Good night, Robin.

MacNEIL: Good night, Jim. That's the NewsHour tonight. We will be back tomorrow night. I'm Robert MacNeil. Good night.

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