

UNIVERSAL CONCERN ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT

The first United Nations conference on the human environment will be held in Stockholm, Sweden, June 5-16, 1972. A Canadian, Mr. Maurice Strong, has, appropriately enough, been appointed Secretary-General of the conference in which 130 nations will participate. Each nation, whether developing or developed, has environmental problems and since Canada might be fitted into either category, Canadians, better than most, should be able to see both points of view.

Since the conference was first proposed to the United Nations by Sweden in 1968, much work has been done: 12,000 pages of preparatory material have been compiled and studied and background material (800 pages) has been distributed to each participating nation. In Canada our National Preparatory Committee has condensed this material and conducted a series of 11 consultations in various cities across the country.

Such public discussions are important for they give background information to the public, they allow the public to talk about environment problems peculiar to their area, and they allow the delegates to the international conference to gain some assurance that recommendations agreed to at the conference can be implemented at home. Unfortunately, the consultation in Regina accomplished little. Attendance was poor and those present seemed entirely absorbed in small local pollution problems. There appeared to be little understanding of the world as one ecosystem, and consequently little feeling of urgency to find solutions for the problem of global environmental deterioration. The brief presented by your editor stressed, in addition to the need for preserving a variety of habitats within individual countries, the following points:

The main cause of environmental deterioration is human population (see Bentley, *Blue Jay*, December 1971; Sheppard, *Blue Jay*, March 1972). Although the United Nations draft declaration on the human environment states that population in certain areas is sufficient to " . . . frustrate all efforts to conquer poverty and underdevelopment and to maintain a decent human environment . . . ", it makes no statement directing the attention of nations to population control. In fact, the draft suggests that many countries " . . . have not yet reached population densities conducive to economic efficiency . . ." Surely, when 70 per cent of the world's population is undernourished or starving, there are enough people, at least until we are able to give everyone adequate food. Also, it is unfair for one country to have policies aimed at stimulating human reproduction while other countries try to reduce their population. Canada, with its wide open spaces and its relatively favorable balance of resources to people, is in an excellent position to show leadership in human population control and human environment protection.

Canada has indeed shown some leadership in the matter of chemicals which man is adding to the environment. With our proportion of people to space and with our ability to monitor the environment for chemicals it is not essential for us to completely ban any chemical in order to protect our own environment. However, large portions of certain long-lived chemicals (e.g. DDT) escape; the general atmosphere and waters of the world become polluted. By banning DDT completely in Canada we are allowing a certain amount of use in other countries where health problems require the use of such a poison.

It is expected that one of the real achievements of the UN conference on environment will be the setting up of a world-wide monitoring system, "Earthwatch," so that all changes in the environment can be recorded and environmental-improvement activities (at present nonexistent or fragmented) co-ordinated internationally. Obviously, the health of the earth is of first importance and man cannot survive without a healthy environment.

It is unlikely that complete agreement among all nations on all complex environmental topics will be reached but at least a start on the international level will have been made. The oceans at present are no-one's responsibility but recently 14 nations in the northeastern Atlantic area came to an agreement on ocean dumping (UN CESI news release December 3, 1971). On April 15, President Nixon and Prime Minister Trudeau signed the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, the first pact between two countries designed to protect and, if possible, revive a shared waterway. These are hopeful initial steps in the right direction.