NEWS & NOTES

● **CORN BLIGHT WATCH:** The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) are planning an experimental ground and air study to monitor a possible revisitation of the southern corn leaf blight, which last year ruined 15 percent of the nation's corn crop. Selected areas in eight corn-belt states will be subjected to detailed ground observation, and NASA high-altitude aircraft will periodically take infrared photographs of about 45,000 square miles of corn-belt area.

Although the project is primarily an experiment designed to detect spread of the blight, USDA officials hope to be able to predict the course of the disease so that farmers can apply fungicides before it reaches their crops. The corn leaf aphid is thought to have caused the greatest loss incurred by a single disease to a single crop in one season in the history of agriculture. America's last big crop plague occurred in 1953 and 1954, when a wheat rust destroyed 25 percent of the bread wheat in the United States.

● **FOREST STUDIES:** Eight eastern universities have joined in a consortium with the United States Forest Service to study how to conserve and expand the remaining forests and natural environments of the heavily populated Northeast. The program, called the Consortium for Environmental Forestry Studies, has been established within the framework of the Forest Service's newly created Pinchot Institute for Environmental Forestry Research.

● **FUND TO AID COLLEGE INVESTING:** A new nonprofit organization has been established to supply colleges and universities with professional management of investments from their endowment funds. The corporation, called the Common Fund for Nonprofit Organizations, is designed to be of particular aid to institutions with small endowments (up to $3.5 million). The Ford Foundation is giving grants totaling $2.8 million for the setting up of the fund, which is eventually expected to become self-supporting. The fund's board of trustees, which is headed by Dartmouth College vice president John F. Meck, anticipates that 25 to 50 institutions will entrust an average of $1 million each by 1 July, when the fund starts operating.

ing together 130 nations to talk productively—even about a matter seemingly as urgent, universal, and apolitical as degradation of the biosphere.

A key point that emerged from the 2-day discussion was that governments of many developing nations have yet to be convinced to take more than a pro forma interest in the proceedings at Stockholm. Further, there is good reason to believe that next year's conference will suffer the crippling effects of old political and cultural wounds such as the division of Germany; indeed, that particular issue, unrelated to environment as it is, has already intruded on conferences preliminary to the main show next year. And perhaps of most immediate concern, conference officials admit that preparations for next year started late and that there is little time to waste.

Sweden's Proposal

The suggestion for a global conference on the environment came from the Swedish delegation to the U.N. in 1968. Such a meeting was regarded as a logical step beyond a flurry of more parochial conferences that the U.N. had sponsored on selected environmental issues since the mid-1950's. There had been a series of international meetings to examine world population growth. The first was a 1954 meeting in Rome that produced a prediction that by 1980 the world population would reach 3500 million. (That figure was passed before 1970.) Other meetings dealt with radiation hazards and the exploitation of unconventional energy sources—geothermal steam, tides, and sunlight. An arm of the U.N., the Economic Commission for Europe, dealt with water pollution on that continent in 1961. Yet another big conference in Geneva in 1963 focused on the application of science and technology to underdeveloped nations.

A General Assembly resolution, adopted in December 1968, established the Stockholm conference, but thereafter the wheels of organization slowed drastically. At the end of 1969, a staff report of the Secretary General urged that a conference staff be gathered as quickly as possible in the new year and that an executive secretary be appointed "immediately." But it was not until last November that the U.N. selected Maurice F. Strong, a former director of Canada's $400 million foreign aid program, to put it all together by the summer of 1972.

Originally, Strong told last week's colloquium, the conference objective was merely to "alert the world to the environmental crisis." But the natural course of events soon made that goal superfluous. "This is no longer our main emphasis," he said. "Concern has accelerated so quickly since 1968 that we now see the prime task of this conference as translating this concern into action . . . ."

This is likely to prove a staggering order for international diplomacy. To fill it, Strong is attempting to orchestrate a bewildering profusion of preliminary activities. Working under a $1.9 million budget, he directs a 27-member preparatory committee and staff from Geneva. While that group polishes up an agenda, five "intergovernmental working groups" drawn from the "prep comm" are trying to come to tentative agreements on such matters as the creation of a global monitoring system for pollutants, means of abating marine pollution, and the drafting of a "declaration on the human environment." Strong's staff is also beginning to receive the first of the "basic papers" requested from U.N. member-governments outlining each nation's key environmental concerns (15 are in preparation by groups culled from U.S. government agencies). Regional meetings to promote the conference are scheduled in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. And finally, Strong has enlisted Rene Dubos, of Rockefeller University, and Barbara Ward, the British economist and writer, to lead several dozen scientists in producing a massive "State of the World Environment" report to be completed by the end of the year.

All of this activity is itself worthwhile, Strong said. But he cautioned that "success or failure will depend in the last analysis on the level of political will with which the governments are armed when they arrive at Stockholm."

Winning the "will" of the developing nations before next June, however, may require overcoming some deep-harbored suspicions about the motives of the environmental movement.

Francesco di Castri, an ecologist at Chile's Austral University, noted that, in nations where the economy is closer to the margins of human survival, governments naturally "resist establishing controls that could limit in any way the rate of industrialization." Further, di Castri indicated that a number of Latin