

News about Stockholm Isn't All Bad, State Officials Say

State Department officials who are deeply involved in preparations for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment next June are expressing the same sort of cautious optimism about the prospects at Stockholm that heralded the President's trip to Peking: "There may be a few concrete accomplishments, but it's still a beginning of great significance."

In this view, the most visible measure of success or failure at Stockholm—the action to be taken on five proposed international conventions—will not be an adequate gauge of this worldwide meeting's full impact on global attitudes toward environmental degradation. Considering the difficulties that have arisen in recent months over the drafting of some of these conventions, this attitude may represent a fallback position of sorts—something of a diplomatic "advance to the rear," though there are important elements of truth to it.

On the positive side, the Stockholm conference will almost certainly agree on a Declaration on the Human Environment, generally described as an environmental bill of rights. Prospects are also good that a convention to regulate ocean dumping of toxic wastes will win approval.

Indeed, ambassadors of 12 West European nations met in Oslo last month to sign an ocean dumping agreement couched in essentially the same terms as the one likely to be on the table at Stockholm. (The Oslo convention is limited in coverage to the northeast Atlantic, the North Sea, and parts of the Arctic Ocean, however.) Basically, the signed agreement forbids the discharge of such highly toxic substances as cadmium and mercury compounds as well as carcinogenic chemicals and certain indestructible plastics. Ocean dumping of substances deemed less harmful is allowed under the Oslo convention, but it is to be controlled by permit systems run by individual governments.

The Stockholm agreement, by contrast, is expected to cover far more of the earth's oceans, if not all of them; but its language will probably be commensurately more general. Neither agreement would encompass oil spills or discharges from land outfalls, and neither provides penalties for violators.

A second convention, and one for which the Stockholm meeting deserves at least indirect credit, is intended to protect wetlands "of international importance" to wildfowl. Vigorously promoted by the Iranian government, this agreement was signed by several nations last year in Ramsar, Iran. More signatories may be recruited at Stockholm, but there are indications that, in deference to the Iranians, the convention itself will not be opened for signing again until a second international wildlife meeting convenes in Iran later this year.

Less encouraging is the likelihood that a generally acceptable convention establishing a "world heritage trust" to protect unique cultural and natural sites cannot be worked up before June. For similar reasons, an agreement to curb international trade in endangered plant and

animal species probably will not be on the table at Stockholm. Nor will an "islands for science" convention be presented, since it is likely to be incorporated in the world trust agreement.

"We had great hopes, but perhaps we were presumptuous to think all this could be arranged in just 1 year before the conference," says Donald R. King, the science adviser to the State Department's Office of Environmental Affairs. Still, King and others are certain that these agreements will be signed before long. "I do believe the conference can take credit for catalyzing action on these proposals, and in many other areas," he says.

Moreover, the conviction is widely held, both at the State Department and among U.N. staff, that 18 months of elaborate international preparations for the Stockholm meeting have served to arouse global interest in environmental problems as never before. One frequently cited illustration of this effect is the collection of "national reports" summarizing environmental problems which 70 countries have submitted to the conference staff. "This is the first time that many of these nations have ever done anything like this," King says. He notes further that within the past year or so, nearly every Western European government has developed an "environmental structure" or has refined an existing one—partly in response to conference preparations.

Aside from the conventions which may or may not be signed at Stockholm, the conference is to vote on some 50 proposals for international action and on another 120 recommendations for national actions. Although wording of these proposals has not yet been released by the conference secretariat, they will encompass six broad subject areas: urbanization, natural resources, pollution, educational and cultural aspects of environmental problems, economic development, and the institutional arrangements that may result from the conference.

Since these proposals are subject to final approval by the U.N. General Assembly, U.S. officials see little reason for not taking them up at Stockholm, even if Eastern European nations boycott the conference.

Another note of relative optimism emanating from the State Department concerns its citizens' advisory committee, headed by Senator Howard H. Baker (R-Tenn.)

For reasons largely beyond the committee's control, it has thus far been rather ineffectual in plugging American public opinion into U.S. preparations for Stockholm. But things are looking up. Once virtually broke, the committee now has an operating budget on the order of \$100,000. Its staff of one has grown to ten, and this month the committee will conduct a series of public hearings in New York, Houston, Denver, San Francisco, Chicago, and Washington, D.C.

By early April, in time for Earth Week, the staff hopes to publish a book of commentary on the Stockholm agenda, incorporating positions the public regards as appropriate for the United States.

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