NEW WORLD

Rocky Road to Stockholm

from our New York Correspondent

FINAL plans for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, in Stockholm, were announced last week in New York by Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of the conference (see *Nature*, January 1, 1971). After four years of confusion, disagreement, and diplomatic manoeuvring, it appears that Strong has managed to put together a conference that will at least give the semblance of world concern over environmental issues and that might even lead to international agreement and action. President Nixon for one seems to be aware of the political possibilities of the meeting. He has already pledged United States support for a future environmental organization based on the United Nations, and rumour has it that he is planning a visit to Stockholm.

"The environment issue is moving out of the 'motherhood' stage," Strong declared last week, "to the point where it is now being seen as one of the most pervasive, profound and revolutionary issues that man has ever faced." Strong's planning staff and the 27-nation Preparatory Committee have put together over the past two years a 600-page set of proposals, combining rhetoric and action, to be formally considered by the 100-odd nations attending the conference.

For the past week the Preparatory Committee has been thrashing out the text of some 23 principles that make up a general Declaration on the Human Environment. "This will constitute the first attempt by the nations of the world," said Strong, "to agree on the new principles of international behaviour and responsibility on which effective management of the global environment must be based."

The broadest area for consideration, however, is the Action Plan, a compendium of specific proposals and recommendations, including proposals for an "Earthwatch" system of global monitoring and information exchange. Altogether there are some 200 recommendations for international action which the conference is supposed to endorse or reject. An additional 300 recommendations for national-level action are listed as suggestions. Many of these proposals have been submitted by individual countries, such as the American-proposed ocean dumping treaty, and many are the results of political bargaining and compromise. "The Action Plan must be seen as a key

element in a political process," Strong emphasized last week, "the indispensable process of achieving the degree of international political consensus without which no meaningful action could proceed."

One of the six sections of the Action Plan is entitled "Development and Environment" and grew out of a planning conference last June at Founex, Switzerland. The resulting Founex Report attempted to place environmental issues within the framework of development problems. It also pointed out the adverse international trade implications of environmental actions that might be taken by the industrial nations, including restrictions on the importation and use of certain commodities, recycling raw materials and a decrease in economic assistance. "If the concern for human environment reinforces the commitment to development," the report noted, "it must also reinforce the commitment to international aid. . . . Unless appropriate economic action is taken, there are a number of ways in which the developing countries could suffer rather than profit from the new emphasis on environment." Many of the proposals do attempt to reassure the developing countries, and the declaration includes the principle that nations have the right to exploit their own resources, and that the environmental policies of all countries should enhance, not adversely affect, the development potential of developing countries.

The poor countries, and especially Brazil, have not been totally convinced by all this rhetoric, but for the moment it looks as though they will attend the conference. This is a good thing for Strong, for Russia and Czechoslovakia announced a few weeks ago that they would not attend if East Germany is excluded. East Germany and West Germany are not members of the United Nations, but East Germany, unlike West Germany, is also not a member of any of the associated international agencies. So West Germany is attending the conference, but unless East Germany is elected to one of the international organizations, such as the World Health Organization, before June, Eastern European participation in the conference might well be limited or non-existent.

While it would obviously lessen the impact of the conference if a major bloc of nations does not participate, the long-term results really will not come into play until next autumn when

the General Assembly meets and, hopefully, establishes a permanent body within the United Nations to deal with international environmental issues. Agreement for the need for such a body and a means of funding it probably will be the most important items to come out of the conference. Strong stated at the last planning meeting that such a body would need from \$30 to \$40 million a year to operate; President Nixon last week claimed that the United States would be prepared to provide \$100 million over five years. It is expected that the United Nations will propose Strong as head of the new organization.

Strong has enough problems facing him within the conference, but he has also been attempting to deal with even more dissident groups outside the formal conference structure. Many of the international youth organizations have criticized the conference for avoiding what they see as the basic issues of the day—the Vietnam war, and American war crimes and chemical-biological warfare. There was fear that these groups would attempt to disrupt the conference, so at last summer's International Youth Conference on the Human Environment in Hamilton, Ontario, Strong agreed to allow 12 delegates from the Hamilton conference to attend as observers working with the International Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and to set up an Environmental Forum.

The Forum would provide a place for all non-participants in the conference itself to meet and hold their own programmes. A working committee of the NGOs, headed by Walter Bogan of the Scientists' Institute for Public Information, is organizing the Forum. Most of the groups have, as yet, failed to suggest firm programmes, but the committee, working with the Swedish NGOs—the United Nations Association of Sweden and the National Council of Swedish Youth—have managed to get the site of the Forum changed from Stockholm's Tennis Stadium, an obviously inadequate site that would have isolated the Forum from the conference, to the more centrally located National School of Arts, Cinema House, and National Park. It remains to be seen if, between now and June, the NGOs can make use of these spaces to pull together a reasonable counter-conference. Whether they can or not, they are certainly likely to make Stockholm more lively in June.