

W. C. FIELDS once remarked that when he visited Philadelphia, it was closed. The same remark could equally well be applied to Washington during the entire month of August this year. Congress has been out of action, President Ford and some of his top advisers have been taking things easy in Colorado, and many federal bureaucrats have been off on their summer holidays, leaving the tourists to face a heat wave and record-breaking pollution levels. The big news story has been whether or not oil prices will be decontrolled, and many esteemed journalists have been driven to writing about how dull it all is. Quite a change from last year.

But at least one body has been keeping busy. The International Cultural Foundation, an organisation linked to the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, a millionaire evangelist from South Korea, has been putting together a meeting called the "Fourth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences", and a glittering array of scientific and academic talent has been signed up to take part in the event. The conference, which is set to take place at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York on November 27-30, is already generating some controversy.

A similar gathering was staged in London last year. It was also stiff with Nobel Laureates and it, too, generated considerable controversy because of Moon's association with the event.

Moon is the founder of the Unification Church, a religious cult founded on an anti-communist philosophy, and supported by street-corner fund raising and by the profits of several Korean industries. Moon, who is said to be close to the South Korean dictatorship, generated some attention last year when he led his followers in prayer on the Capitol steps for the political survival of President Nixon. And his church has recently been in the headlines thanks to a court suit brought by the parents of a teenage girl who are attempting to reclaim their daughter from its clutches. They claim that the church has so much psychological influence over her that she cannot exercise her free will.

The Fourth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences has, however, attracted a list of sponsors and advisers which reads like a page out of the *Who's Who* of science. A letter sent with invitations to the meeting lists as chairmen or advisers Eugene Wigner, Alvin Weinberg, Kenneth Mellanby, Edward David, Werner Heisenberg, C. P. Snow, Jean Piaget, Julius Axelrod, Herman Kahn, Jonas Salk, and many others. But, according to an article in *Science and Government Report*, several of the participants listed in the letter are considering drop-

ping out. They were either unaware of Moon's connection with the International Cultural Foundation when they accepted invitations, or they are simply having second thoughts about being associated with an event sponsored by Moon's organisation. Similar problems arose with the London meeting last year.

Discontent about Moon's sponsorship of the conference has prompted section chairmen to send a letter to other participants assuring them that the International Cultural Foundation will not interfere in the conference, and that participants will be free to express their own views.

Washington seen

by Colin Norman



But the letter hasn't stilled the discontent and more dropouts can be expected.

● Congress reassembles this week, prepared to do battle with President Ford on oil prices and various other matters. In between the skirmishes, it may get round to passing a bill to re-establish a science policy office in the White House. There has, at least, been some discernable progress on that measure.

Last month, on the eve of the Congressional recess, Representatives Olin Teague and Charles Mosher, respectively the chairman and senior Republican on the House Committee on Science and Technology, jointly introduced a bill which is likely to be passed by the House with little change. The measure is similar in many respects to President Ford's proposal, although it spells out the duties of the office in some detail, and it is prefaced by a

lengthy discourse on the objectives for a national science policy.

The bill would establish a White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), headed by a director who would double as the science adviser to the President, and four deputies. Its chief task would be to provide advice to the president on "scientific and technological considerations involved in areas of national concern, including, but not limited to, the economy, national security, health, foreign relations, the environment, and the technological recovery and use of resources. It would also be required to help in the preparation of the federal budget, and "assist the President in providing general leadership and co-ordination of the research and development programs of the federal government". The bill does not state how the office should function within the White House, however, leaving such arrangements for the President to determine.

One item in the bill which was not included in Ford's proposal is the setting up of a Presidential commission, consisting of between 5 and 12 scientists, to carry out a 15-month study of the federal government's science and technology programmes, and to recommend ways in which the overall effort can be improved.

The bill is expected to be passed by the House Science and Technology Committee later this month, and by the full House in October. Meanwhile, the Senate Committees on Labor and Public Welfare, Science and Astronautics, and Commerce, which all have jurisdiction over the bill, will probably hold hearings later this month.

One factor which could upset the timing however, is that Teague was taken ill last month with what was believed to be a stroke, and although he has been discharged from hospital, it is unclear whether his committee schedules will be affected.

● The National Science Foundation (NSF) which has been having severe political problems with critics in Congress, has so far been let off lightly. An amendment designed to give Congress power to veto any individual NSF grant before it is awarded, which was attached to a bill earlier this year by the House has finally been discarded completely. The final version of the bill was passed without the amendment last month and sent to President Ford.

● Finally, the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board has demonstrated a fine sense of irony. It has scheduled a hearing on the proposed demonstration liquid metal fast breeder reactor, which has broken all records for cost overruns, in the US Bankruptcy Courtroom.