The GDR and Stockholm: Politics before ecology

For a man, a nation, or a world bloc, the transition to enlightened self-interest is difficult. If the pattern in the past has been one of unenlightened exploitation, then former or current victims are skeptical of more compassionate behavior. In short, both the Soviet and Western blocs have created deep credibility gaps.

Thus it is that the lesser developed countries (LDC's) have some doubts about the environmental concern being displayed nowadays by industrialized nations, East and West. The suspicion is that this concern may be just a new way to give the LDC's the shaft—by squelching economic development and by imposing population controls. As Canada's Maurice F. Strong, United Nations undersecretary for the environment, told the National Press Club in Washington last week, this is not the case at all. But a squabble between the Soviet Union and the United States threatens now to badly damage the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in June, and the LDC's are likely to see the squabble as just more evidence of the real priorities of the developed nations: The Soviets and Americans seem to be placing questions of national prestige ahead of environment, while saying, with the other side of their mouths, that achieving environmental harmony is critical to human survival.

The squabble is over the Stockholm status of the two Germanies. West Germany, although not a UN member, belongs to various UN subsidiary organizations, and thus will have a general UN observer status and full voting rights at Stockholm. But East Germany does not belong even to the subsidiary organizations. The U.S. State Department says it is being benign by not objecting to East Germany—the world's 10th industrial power—as a Stockholm observer. But it draws a "firm line" against voting attendance. So the U.S.S.R. and Czechoslovakia have drawn an equally firm line; they will not go to Stockholm at all if East Germany can't vote.

The State Department rationale, also accepted by France and England: An important treaty between East and West Germany is pending ratification, but the West German *Bundestag* cannot vote on it until after Stockholm. East German membership in a subsidiary organization, and consequent voting rights at Stockholm, would give East Germany international status the United States and its allies do not want it to have till the treaty is ratified. Therefore, the United States is now actively politicking against East German acceptance into membership by the World Health Organization Council at a May meeting. "We think we have a majority," a State Department official told SCIENCE NEWS.

The official contends that a major secondary issue is one of the Soviets wanting an excuse not to go to Stockholm. Soviet academicians are fond of saying that Marxist-Leninist philosophy is proof against pollution, which they view as mostly a capitalist problem. The facts are otherwise and the Soviets don't want to admit, as they would have to at Stockholm, that they have severe environmental problems, says the official.

The industrialized nations are the major perpetrators of pollution. They are also the major models for LDC economic development, and they export pollution problems to these nations. On the other side, they alone have the technological capability for achieving environmental harmony. "The success of the conference will be far more dependent upon the industrialized countries than upon any other," says Strong. □

United Nations

Strong: Selling ecology to LDC's

Toward birth control by vaccination

Birth control by vaccination is looming large, according to Andrew Schally of the Veterans Administration Hospital in New Orleans, and a world leader in fertility hormone reseaarch.

"We have made antiserum that may be the first step in the production of vaccination against fertility," the European-born investigator told SCIENCE NEWS. "We are using three or four different approaches to convert LH-RH into antifertility substance."

LH-RH, or luteinizing hormone-releasing hormone, is a chemical secreted by the pituitary gland in the brain. It serves as an executive switchboard over fertility in both men and women. □

Science board urges a policy for technology

Each year since 1969 the National Science Board has prepared a report on the policy aspects of some of scientific concern. The first three covered graduate education for science, the physical sciences and environmental science.

This year's report, issued last week, deals with what has certainly become the most fashionable topic in Government science policy circles in the last half year or so: the need for a national policy for technology. The roots of the concern are intricate and varied, but they fall into two main groups. One is the now rather widely acknowledged desire to turn technology toward the solution of the nation's problems. The other is worry about the health of the economy. "The economic strength of certain industries, particularly long established, basic industries, has diminished in domestic and foreign markets partly because of lagging effort in research and development," says the board. This alleged faltering of industrial R&D apparently has come despite greater growth in R&D expenditures by industry than by Government in the last decade (see p. 265).

The board urges acceptance of the idea that the Federal Government has a new role—to stimulate and support R&D in American industry and to balance that stimulus with means of technology assessment.

It makes five recommendations: The Government should encourage basic and applied research in industry; key technologies that are necessary for reaching national goals but that are not commercially viable should be bolstered by Government-aided R&D; groups of full-time professionals should be established to study national problems on a continuing basis and to explore future alternatives; the National Science Foundation and the Office of Education should promote a better public understanding of technology; many agencies, including NSF, should set up groups to evaluate the benefits of new technologies and to call attention to their potential hazards.

By themselves, the recommendations contain little that is new. But they do add important support to the Administration's effort to inject some oomph into industry and the economy via Government-stimulated R&D. Coming from the policy chieftains of NSF, the agency that until a few years ago was regarded as the voice of basic science in academia, they'll carry a certain unmeasurable weight among those portions of the scientific community who have not always been enthusiastic about White House programs. □