

American officials remain understandably more concerned than their Canadian counterparts with the relatively localized trans-boundary effects of near-border developments like the Saskatchewan Poplar River and Ontario Atikokan power plants and specific major sources such as the Inco smelter plant outside Sudbury, Ontario — the largest single source of sulphur dioxide in the world. They would like the Canadian federal and provincial governments to commit themselves to tough emission standards for new sources of air pollution such as those in effect in the United States. American officials are also pressing for improved bilateral procedures regarding "prior notice and consultation" on the air quality effects of planned development and for access by American citizens to Canadian courts in pollution matters similar to that offered foreigners under existing U.S. laws. If no notable shift has occurred in the U.S. position, American officials now seem to be more concerned about and willing to deal with the acid rain problem. It is still not a first priority among U.S. environmental problems, but it is increasingly recognized as a serious issue.

It is almost certain a bilateral air quality agreement will eventually be concluded. The process will not be an easy one — the associated pollution control costs will be very high and the opposition from polluters will be substantial. It does seem highly unlikely that the two governments, having come so far, would decide to end the negotiations or even be able to adjourn them in failure. Therefore, the important question is not whether there will be an agreement, but whether it will be a tough and effective one or essentially a promissory note. The signs are not good.

### Pollution control

On the Canadian side such an agreement will require, as the Americans have often pointed out, better control of existing sources of pollution and more stringent regulations and controls on new sources. Under existing constitutional arrangements, these measures would have to be implemented by the provinces. Federal and provincial officials have been meeting for some time to discuss control strategies and to work toward a federal-provincial accord. Despite recent announcements of future emission reductions by such major polluters as Inco and Ontario Hydro, setting the "Canadian house" in order will not be an easy task.

On the U.S. side, the prospects seem even gloomier. The bulk of present acid rain-producing emissions come from old, coal-fired electrical generating plants in the Ohio valley and the northeast. In operation before the U.S. federal Clean Air Act came onto being, most plants remain virtually unregulated and uncontrolled. The EPA is restricted in what it can do about these sources under existing federal statutes. Moreover, any such moves would be strenuously resisted by the influential power utilities and coal mining companies involved and most of the governments of

the states in which they operate. The prospects also seem dim for any improvement or tightening by Congress of the current laws. Indeed, concerns have been expressed on numerous occasions recently by EPA officials and environmental groups that Congress will be heavily pressured to weaken rather than strengthen the Clean Air Act when it is reviewed in 1981.

Some officials involved are looking to the possibility of a new, significantly mobilized coalition of forces to counteract such pressures. One element in this coalition would be northeastern and New England states which are most affected by long-range transport and acid rain. Another element might be those of coal-producing states — such as Pennsylvania — which have a reasonable record of controls but are being severely affected by neighbouring states' emissions. A third element might be a rather odd-seeming collection of conservation and recreation associations, sportsmen's groups like the politically powerful National Rifle Association, agricultural interests and forestry interests. Whether such a political coalition will come together and prove effective, however, is highly uncertain.

### Contentious issues

It is virtually inevitable, even if some sort of an agreement is reached within the next few years, that acid rain and the broader problem of the long-range transport of air pollution will remain contentious and difficult bilateral issues for a long time. The 1972 and 1978 Great Lakes Agreements did not result in the removal of the Lakes' water quality problems from the Canadian-American political agenda. Rather, these Agreements have secured a seemingly permanent place for this evolving issue. The same result is likely in the case of acid rain and long-range transport. Moreover, scientific understanding of the physical and chemical phenomena involved and their ecological effects is still relatively limited. In particular, the highly sophisticated computer models needed for rational policy making to forecast the effects of alternative emission control strategies are only now being developed and tested. As these are improved and the relevant scientific knowledge expanded, policy measures adopted by both countries and bilateral commitments exchanged between them will probably undergo revision.

Although science is of increasing importance in international relations, even an abundance of scientific evidence remains a poor match for a determined political opposition. The high economic stakes involved in the acid rain problem have ensured the pre-eminence of politics in the matter. The strong opposition to strict air pollution emission reductions will not disappear as the result of initial control measures. Nor will most polluters accede willingly to such regulations. The political battles over acid rain, both domestic and bilateral, are only beginning.