

scientific journal appeared in 1972. Almost two decades behind the Europeans, a precipitation sampling network was established in Canada in the mid-1970s. A parallel network in the U.S. was later created.

Events at the political level, though, did not await the results of the scientists. In a June 1977 speech, federal Environment Minister Romeo Leblanc called the acid rain problems in North America an "environmental time bomb." He also said he expected negotiations with U.S. officials on a bilateral agreement to begin "within weeks". Exactly the same forecast was repeated by a senior Environment department official in February 1978. Although some preliminary talks had been held in the interim, progress was minimal. American officials appeared hesitant, no doubt fully expecting their country would be shown to be the dominant source of the emissions that produce acid rain.

Pressures of a different sort for talks were created in the fall when Congress passed a resolution requiring the State Department to negotiate toward an air quality agreement with Canada. The key figures behind this unexpected move were a small group of border state Congressmen whose constituents were concerned about possible air pollution from local sources in Canada. In particular, the concern was focused on two coal-fired power plants being built just across the boundary line in southern Saskatchewan (Poplar river project) and northwestern Ontario (Atikokan project). On November 16, 1978, the State Department dutifully, albeit perhaps a little reluctantly, sent a diplomatic note to Ottawa proposing "informal" discussions begin on an air pollution agreement.

The Congressional action and subsequent U.S. note were understandably welcomed by the Canadian side. Although the specific underlying American concerns differed from those of Canada, the initiative, as one Canadian official put it, "played right into our hands." Exploratory meetings of officials were held in December 1978 and in June 1979. The May 1979 election of a Progressive-Conservative government also created another impetus. The new Environment Minister, John Fraser, began a campaign of his own to publicize the problem of acid rain and to speed up talks with the United States. In July the two governments issued a rather general statement of principles on which a formal agreement might be based. Fraser made a follow-up visit to Washington. But the contents of such an agreement remained uncertain, both in political and scientific terms.

The one achievement of the early discussions had been the decision to establish a bilateral group of government scientists to discuss scientific research into long-range transport of air pollution. Notably, the much and justly honoured International Joint Commission (IJC) was not given any role or responsibility. This decision reflected in part a belief that an IJC study might take too long to complete and, in part, a concern over how the increasingly environmentally

oriented Commission might handle the problem or use the new responsibilities. The governments, as usual, were unwilling to relinquish much control over an important issue.

The bilateral Research Consultation Group (RCG) held two formal meetings — in July 1978 and then again the following March. As suggested by the name, it had been operating as a forum for the exchange of scientific information and comparison of research activities. In 1979, perceiving the desirability of a joint statement on the problem, the governments requested the RCG to produce an overview report which could be made public. The report was released in October 1979, perhaps timed to coincide with a major "action conference" on acid rain organized in Toronto by environmental groups. The RCG report represented a fairly comprehensive and objective compilation of existing scientific knowledge. It confirmed what was already well accepted — that the U.S. produced about four times the transboundary acid rain than Canada did. The conclusions, the scientists stressed, were preliminary and that the whole problem of acid rain had to be studied much more thoroughly.

On November 13, 1979, Canada, the U.S. and 32 European countries signed an agreement calling for the reduction of air pollution and specifically the reduction of transboundary, long-range transport.

This resolution represented one result of considerable pressure from Scandinavian countries on their neighbours. It also reflected the political resistance put up by the major polluting states as it did not commit its signatories to undertake specific reductions. Environment Minister Fraser and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) head Douglas Costle agreed at this meeting to accelerate their own negotiation timetable for a bilateral agreement. Further meetings in early 1980 discussed the form and content of such an agreement, and found the Canadians pressing for firm American commitments on the emission of sulphur and nitrogen oxides.

Then came a sudden change in the political climate. Documents leaked in Washington showed that the Carter Administration was about to propose to Congress a \$10 billion program to assist in converting U.S. power plants to coal. Canadian officials had long expected and were worried about such a shift, but were particularly upset by the lack of environmental provisions in the proposal to ensure that the conversion process did not result in substantially increased emissions and more acid rain. Carter administration officials subsequently confirmed the conversion would in fact have both effects.

Despite the psychological setback, official-level talks continued and were encouraged by John Roberts who became Environment Minister when the Liberal government was returned to power in February 1980.