

U.N. WATCH

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Hopeful Signs?

Belgrade—What appeared to be another frustrating East-West confrontation over freedom of the press has ended in a compromise. At the UNESCO meeting in Belgrade in September and October, nasty words were tossed around as representatives of the industrialized nations argued with Third World and Russian delegates over the regulation of international news agencies and the licensing of journalists. The less-developed countries maintain that the international news media, dominated by the Western powers, color the news to the detriment of the poorer nations. The smaller countries, which make up the majority of U.N. members, want more control over news sent abroad.

A report commissioned by UNESCO favored strengthening the communications systems of the poorer nations but also suggested a licensing program for the "protection" of journalists. The West views licensing as a means of controlling journalists so that governments can use the media for their own ends.

The compromise reached by the 154 UNESCO members postponed for two years the restructuring of world communications and established a subsidiary unit, the International Program for the Development of Communications, to help the poorer countries with their media problems. Still, it remains altogether unlikely that Western news media will relinquish their autonomy; and the vociferous post-session debate suggests there is little chance of Western agreement to such a new information order.

Washington—Meetings of the World Bank and the IMF can be pretty staid affairs, shoring up weak currencies or recycling petrodollars. These are still major topics, but recent sessions, such as the one just ended in Washington, have moved into areas beyond mere banking. The World Bank, under retiring president Robert S. McNamara, has eased the burden of rising fuel costs in poorer countries; and through its soft-loan affiliate, the International Development Association, it has tried to ease the grinding poverty under which millions live. The Third World, of course, wants the Bank and the Fund to do much more.

Reacting to this pressure, the Bank has agreed to provide additional funds to poor countries for the development of energy sources to lessen dependence on costly oil imports. The IMF agreed to a large expansion of international credit under easier conditions.

An explosive issue was set aside for another day. Voting rights in the Bank and Fund are based on economic size, giving the U.S. a 20 per cent bloc of votes. Third World members want this changed, but there is fear in other quarters that a one-member-one-vote formula will give the more than a hundred U.N. members the power to change the institutions from "guardians of financial discipline" to international welfare agencies.

New York—At a seminar at Columbia University on the Law of the Sea Treaty, Elliot L. Richardson, who recently resigned as the head of the United States dele-

gation, said the six-year conference has produced a treaty ready for signing in the spring of 1981. Hundreds of questions have been resolved on such matters as limits of territorial waters, fishing, mineral rights, freedom of the high seas, and landlocked countries. Mr. Richardson expressed the hope that "the ingenuity that was prevalent in Geneva" will prevail and that disputes about participation of private corporations, the rights of developing countries, and protection of investments will not delay the signing.

For Whom the Poll Tolls

An election year is a great time for the pollsters, the public opinion experts who read the voters' mind. There are some among the laity, though, who harbor a suspicion that "public opinion" doesn't exist at all. They are inclined to the view that it is an invention of politicians, who, by their incessant rhetoric, have convinced the sociologists and nose-counters that the public really has an opinion. And it may well be that the sum of the responses of badly informed individuals does add up to an informing public opinion.

At any rate, polls will be with us forever, and a recent one by the Roper Organization is of special interest. It has become fashionable to say the American "public" is fed up with the United Nations. Every year a few congressmen try to reduce our contributions to the world organization, while the new conservatives see in the U.N. a plot to undermine our sovereignty. Roper questioned two thousand individuals on their attitude toward the U.N. (Roper, by the way, had the rare distinction of predicting accurately the outcome of the 1976 presidential election.) One of the most significant conclusions to emerge from the poll is that more than a majority of Americans favor a foreign policy based on cooperation with other countries over one that takes an isolationist approach. Although critical of the U.N., respondents by a margin of two to one favored increased participation. A majority, 53 per cent, believed the U.N. was doing a poor job; 38 per cent rated it favorably.

Public support was evident on human rights issues. Forty-eight per cent favored ratification of the human rights treaties drafted by the U.N.; 25 per cent opposed ratification. The poll found some odd shifts in opinion: The traditionally liberal Northeast seemed less sympathetic to international cooperation than the "increasingly internationalist West." Younger people, those born in the thirty-five years since the U.N. was founded, were more receptive to active U.S. participation than their elders. And blacks were found to be less critical of the U.N.'s record than were whites.

The poll was commissioned by the United Nations Association. Elliot Richardson, its chairman, found the poll encouraging. "American responsibility and the need for our leadership remain undiminished," he said. "They must increasingly be exercised, however, by working together with other nations to solve the global problems we all face. The poll shows the public knows this. The political leadership should accept it."

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