

U.N. WATCH

Near the Brink

The current battle over UNESCO finances and philosophy may determine not only the future of that specialized agency but the viability of the United Nations itself. Finance has always been a sticky business at the U.N., where arrears are mounting steadily (see "U.N. Watch," May). A large reduction in the United States contribution, now amounting to about 25 per cent of the annual U.N. budget, could cripple the organization.

UNESCO is only the tip of the iceberg. An increased membership in the U.N. of underdeveloped countries—some hardly nations in the traditional sense—has ended domination of the world body by the industrialized West. The "eternal five"—the U.S., Great Britain, Russia, France, and China—still exercise a veto in the Security Council, but in other U.N. organs the principle of one nation-one vote puts the wealthiest and most powerful countries of the world in the minority; among them only the USSR does not find itself consistently outvoted.

While the largest contributors are insisting upon budgetary restraint and a smaller bureaucracy, the poorer nations are demanding a bigger cut of a bigger pie. Increasingly, U.N. votes on all such matters are marked by ideological confrontations and attacks on free-wheeling capitalism.

The Reagan administration came to office on a platform extremely critical of the U.N.—criticism founded on an underlying suspicion of all foreign entanglements other than military ones. Today, the most important foreign policy think tank firmly in the Reagan camp is The Heritage Foundation, with headquarters in Washington. Unabashedly patriotic and conservative, dedicated to upholding the American free enterprise system and to defending the Western concept of human rights, the foundation has been watching the U.N. and its agencies for years. Its "Backgrounders" on a variety of U.N. programs, clearly written and elaborately documented, evince little faith in the U.N. and even less in UNESCO.

In a 1982 "Backgrounder" on UNESCO, Heritage gave the agency a failing grade in education—one of UNESCO's major reasons for being, according to its charter. While UNESCO is one of the world's largest publishers of books and documents and has a superb distribution system, the report notes, it is distributing the wrong kind of material. Quoting extensively from UNESCO publications, the Heritage Foundation analysis points to a line of thought favoring centralized, government-controlled education. That is, it says, just the sort of thing that breeds adherents to the New International Economic Order—a visionary plan to eliminate poverty in the poor countries by a transfer of wealth and technology from North to South. And indeed, the rhetoric of UNESCO publications often runs away with itself, ritualistically blaming imperialism and capitalist exploitation for the endemic poverty and overpopulation of Africa and Asia.

Then there is the New World Cultural Order (NWCO), the subject of another 1982 Heritage "Backgrounder." "Cultural" is the "C" in UNESCO's acronym, and the term's vagueness makes possible the funding of almost any activity voted by a majority of members. This study too quotes

extensively from UNESCO publications and speeches, discovering a constant repudiation of Western values in education, communications, economics, and literature and increased support for socialist/authoritarian government control. Under the education and culture umbrellas came the UNESCO plan for a New World Information Order that aroused the Western press and led it to issue the Talloires Declaration affirming freedom of the individual as the primary concern of the government.

The Heritage Foundation recommends not only that the United States resign from UNESCO but that it reconsider its membership in the United Nations at large.

Another view of the United Nations is provided by the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA), an independent organization that is the country's foremost supporter of the U.N. and of U.S. membership in global organizations. Rightists call the organization "internationalist"—a pejorative term—but the UNA-USA board, composed of executives of large corporations, lawyers, bankers, and academics, is hardly a leftist group.

UNA too has issued a paper on UNESCO, one that essentially agrees with the charges that have led the United States to announce its resignation from the agency next year: too many divisive political issues, lack of budgetary control (Great Britain and even the USSR support this contention); and geographical imbalance in top administrative jobs. UNA, however, urges the U.S. to retain its membership in UNESCO, arguing that reforms should come from within and that the U.S. use its considerable weight to gain support for change.

Also taking a stand against U.S. withdrawal is the National Academy of Science, which asserts that there are presently no substitutes for the meetings convened by UNESCO. And, according to the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO, a State Department advisory body, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the National Education Association, and the American Newspapers Publishers Association oppose resignation too.

The UNA report does not deal at length with the issues raised by the Heritage Foundation. Taking U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO Jean Girard's view of the General Conference in Paris last October as evidence of improvement—"we can take pride...in many of the accomplishments"—UNA contends this is the wrong time to pull out.

In its evaluation of the same conference, the Heritage Foundation's observer noted that the conferees avoided the usual nasty confrontations and attributed this to "straight talking" by Gregory Newell, U.S. assistant secretary of state for international organizations, the chief proponent of U.S. withdrawal.

The question is: What is the best way to use U.S. power in such situations? If, as Heritage claims, UNESCO is promoting a "global welfare state" at U.S. expense, is it best to stay and fight or take the money and run? The Heritage Foundation thinks our representatives are unable to stand up to UNESCO's majority or get the director-general, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow of Senegal, to alter his policies. UNA says our words and actions have had a healthy effect, as demonstrated by the last UNESCO General Conference. No decision can be expected before the U.S. presidential election in November.

STEPHEN S. FENICHELL