

UNESCO ADOPTS AUSTERE BUDGET, JETTISONS NEW INFORMATION ORDER

Meeting in Paris last November for its biennial session, the General Conference of UNESCO had its first opportunity to pass judgment on the reform program adopted by the organization's new director general, Federico Mayor Zaragoza, and to take such steps as it pleased to woo back the United States, Great Britain and Singapore. The General Conference approved Mayor's six-year medium-term plan but refused his request for a 2.5% budget increase for the next two years, freezing the budget instead. At the same time, the General Conference adopted a communications program that firmly commits UNESCO to freedom of the press and the free flow of ideas, but that also calls on the organization to help promote a "wider and better balanced dissemination of information" between rich and poor countries.

The new communications program has done much to appease critics of UNESCO who were alarmed by suggestions made, in the context of UNESCO's proposed "new world information order," to license reporters covering Third World news for audiences and organizations in rich countries. Leonard Sussman of Freedom House in New York has called the program the best communications plan ever produced by UNESCO: "Commitment to free flow is repeated to the point of boredom. The operative part of the resolution would facilitate and guarantee for journalists 'the freedom to report and the fullest possible access to information.'"

Sussman was a member of a panel organized by the United Nations Association of the United States that recommended, shortly before UNESCO's General Conference convened last fall, that the United States rejoin the organization, assuming the General Conference expressed confidence in Mayor's leadership by approving his medium-term plan. "By remaining outside the agency after the General Conference has approved policy reforms the United States has long

sought, America will sacrifice any credibility to press for further reform," the panel said.

While the UNA panel was a distinguished and select group—its chairman was Robert T. Stafford, a former US Senator from Vermont—its influence in the inner circles of the Bush Administration may be slight, at best. Critics of UNESCO in the Administration do not necessarily agree with the panel that the organization has already adopted and implemented the policy reforms the United States was seeking—in Washington it is said that Mayor is "in thrall" to his predecessor, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, and that M'Bow's allies remain in positions of influence. Even if the Bush Administration were fully satisfied with Mayor and the new positions adopted by the General Conference, budgetary worries alone would virtually preclude the US rejoining any sooner than it feels it absolutely has to. And even if the Administration decided it wanted to rejoin right now, it still would have critics to contend with.

Physics News in 1989

Since 1984 a special supplement called *Physics News* has appeared each year in the January issue of *PHYSICS TODAY*. Prepared by the public information division of the American Institute of Physics, this annual review was originally intended for use by science journalists. The review for 1989 is aimed primarily at that audience, and so it has been decided to publish *Physics News* only as a separate brochure and not to include it in *PHYSICS TODAY* this year. *Physics News in 1989* is priced at \$5 for single copies, \$3 a copy for 10–20 copies, and \$2 a copy for more than 20 copies. Orders should be addressed to the Public Information Division, AIP, 335 East 45 Street, New York NY 10017.

Judging from leading organs of business-oriented opinion in the United States and Britain, political conservatives—and not just conservatives—remain highly critical of UNESCO. *The Wall Street Journal*, in an editorial written before the General Conference had ended, expressed itself as follows on 1 November: "He [Mayor] hasn't been able to replace the M'Bow cabal. Soviets remain in charge of education programs, a former head of an African military tribunal for executions is in charge of culture, and a hard-line Polish communist in exile directs the human-rights and peace division. Of the agency's 2750 staff members, 230 are in the field working on actual projects, such as literacy and oceanographic research."

In much the same vein, on 2 December *The Economist* of London ran a feature article on the United Nations in which UNESCO was sized up in the following terms: "The new man, Mr. Federico Mayor Zaragoza, looked good on paper. A suave Catalan biochemist, his candidacy was supported by 100 Nobel-prize winners. Two years later, what has Mr. Mayor been able to achieve? UNESCO seems to be as unfocused as ever, with 182 'sub-programs,' more even than there were under Mr. M'Bow."

Under the circumstances, it seems probable that the United States, Britain and Singapore will bide their time. The official State Department position is that the actions of the General Conference are under review, but that nothing at this point would change standing US policy. Friends of UNESCO in Washington do not expect to see a change in the months immediately ahead.

Looking ahead

For the bulk of the US physics community, the world does not exactly depend on whether or not the United States does or does not rejoin UNESCO. On the other hand, it is generally appreciated that UNESCO is a name that still carries considerable weight