

THE U.S. AND UNESCO : TIME FOR DECISION

The Twenty-Second session of the General Conference of UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) in Paris ended on November 26. Meanwhile, a "fundamental reappraisal" of the U.S. relationship with UNESCO now being conducted by the U.S. Government is in its final stages. The results are to be released before the end of this year. The next few weeks, therefore, are crucial in determining America's policy toward what is, beyond question, the most virulently anti-American--and most inefficient and wasteful--member of the United Nations system.

A recent Heritage Backgrounder argued that the U.S. should serve notice that it will quit UNESCO at the end of 1984 unless sweeping changes are forthcoming. It should take this course for two reasons:

- (1) Because it is morally and politically wrong for America to continue to lend authority and legitimacy--and to provide some \$70 million each year (25 percent of UNESCO's budget)--to an organization dedicated to attacking its fundamental American values and interests.
- (2) Because the existing structure and ethics of UNESCO make it impossible for the United States and other liberal democracies to change things from within, by debate and negotiation.

Basic changes in UNESCO will only be seriously considered when and if those who hold power in the organization--the Director General and the Third World majority--are convinced that the cost of not implementing them will be the departure of the United States.

The General Conference which has just finished has changed nothing. It is true that the Conference was unusually low-keyed and muted, largely devoid of the bitter confrontations, the outrageous manipulations of procedures and the extreme polemics which have been the stock-in-trade of recent UNESCO conferences. But this occurred only after some straight talking by Gregory Newell, the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations, who made it clear that the U.S. meant business. Those in control at UNESCO then decided it was prudent to be restrained--for the time being. But a tap easily turned off can just as easily be turned back on; and the same hands are on that tap.

It is true that the U.S. delegation worked hard at the General Conference to remove some of the most obnoxious features of UNESCO's programs for the next two years and that it had some significant successes. But, as noteworthy as these successes are, they did not change

the fundamental problems. The original UNESCO programs, with all their ideological biases and wastefulness, remain essentially intact. So does the power structure within UNESCO, which has created the current crisis.

It would be a major error, therefore, to conclude that the relatively subdued nature of the Twenty-Second General Conference represented any sort of a turning point or that it provides any basis for optimism about the future. In short, the Conference left the basic situation completely unchanged.

Some argue that although UNESCO is admittedly a pernicious organization, the U.S. must stay in so that it can "manage" things and prevent them from becoming even worse. This is a bad argument on two accounts. First, neither the U.S. nor other Western countries have shown any capacity to so manage the organization, whose behavior has become progressively more anti-Western and irresponsible in recent years. Second, the presence of the U.S., even more than its money, serves to give flavor and point to the anti-American ideological game now being played in UNESCO. It has to be there for its discomfiture to be evident and visible. If it were to leave, that game would quickly lose most of its appeal and purpose.

In Paris, during the Conference, Assistant Secretary of State Newell warned that the U.S. reappraisal will recommend one of only two options: a dramatically increased U.S. commitment to UNESCO to try to offset the current drift, or withdrawal. The U.S. would not stay "in the middle." This was a healthy clarification; it authoritatively established the seriousness of the reappraisal and shattered the illusion that the U.S. was merely bluffing.

Yet an increased commitment, however dramatic, cannot in itself be effective. America's problem with UNESCO does not stem from an inadequate performance in the existing game, but from the nature of the game itself. It is a political problem and will only yield to a political solution.

The only effective political leverage available to the U.S. is a commitment to withdraw and withhold the very substantial contribution it now makes to UNESCO's budget, unless the organization puts its house in order and dramatically changes its ways.

The U.S. reappraisal should not shrink from recognizing and acting upon this. If it does so, Congress should take appropriate action. It should do so not as the beginning of a general campaign against the United Nations system, but as specific action against an organization which, even by U.N. standards, is a deviant and delinquent member of that system.

If, after the high profile which has been given the reappraisal, such action is not taken, America's credibility as a country which must be taken seriously in the context of UNESCO will be virtually destroyed.

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For further information:

Owen Harries, "The U.S. and UNESCO at the Crossroads," Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 298, October 19, 1983.