

A Research and Educational Affiliate of TransAfrica

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THE U.S. AND UNESCO

Since the formation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1945, the United States has been an active member and moving force in the organization. At the Founding Conference William Benton and Archibald MacLeish led the U.S. delegation, and MacLeish subsequently made a substantial contribution to the writing of the UNESCO constitution. After UNESCO began its work in 1946, Americans continued to play key roles in the administration and operation of UNESCO; and the U.S. became the organization's largest contributor.

In the most recent years, however, U.S. relations with UNESCO have soured. As a result of the organization's growth in members and the consequent broadening of its focus, the U.S. has become dissatisfied with UNESCO, its policies, and its programs. This dissatisfaction culminated in the Reagan administration's decision to withdraw from membership in the organization at the end of this year.

But this decision has raised a number of questions concerning the administration's attitudes toward both UNESCO in particular and multilateral institutions in general. This ISSUE BRIEF will examine the charges against UNESCO leveled by the administration and the reasons behind the decision to withdraw, beginning with an interview of Dr. Herschelle Challenor, Director of the UNESCO Washington Liaison Office. □



Marvin Jones

Herschelle Challenor, Director, UNESCO Washington Liaison Office

In December the U.S. announced its decision to withdraw from UNESCO. How would you respond to the allegations against UNESCO which were made during that announcement?

CHALLENGOR: On December 29, 1983 the State Department formally announced the U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO. Alan Romberg, who made the announcement, listed three reasons: extraneous politicization of virtually every subject UNESCO treats; hostility toward the basic institutions of a free society, especially a free market and a free press; and demonstrated unrestrained budgetary expansion.

On the question of extraneous politicization, one must recognize that any inter-governmental organization is of necessity political because the positions articulated in those fora are the policies of member states living in a divergent world where different state interests abound. Because of the nature of the issues which fall within UNESCO's compe-

tence, politically sensitive questions necessarily are brought before the organization. It also is important to note that in 1954 the U.S., joined by Great Britain, successfully sought a change from independent intellectuals to government representatives as UNESCO Executive Board members. One could argue, therefore, that some of the politicization, which the Reagan administration criticizes, was caused by the U.S.

The administration also alleged that UNESCO supports a "statist" approach. The U.S., however, is not structured like most countries of the world. Even most European countries have Ministers of Education, Ministers of Culture, and Ministers of Information. Therefore, UNESCO representatives espouse views that reflect their own political systems. Those views may be considered "statist" by some, but every member of UNESCO has an equal vote and has the right to express his or her own views.

The most difficult allegation to accept is the notion of "unrestrained budgetary expansion." The figures simply belie the charge. The UNESCO 1982-1983 budget was \$430.6 million dollars. The 1984-1985 budget approved in the General Conference in November is for \$374.4 million. This represents a decrease of nearly \$57 million. In addition because of the devaluation of the French franc, \$70 million dollars worth of savings will be returned to the member states based on the percentage of their contribution to the UNESCO budget. The U.S. now contributes twenty-five percent of the UNESCO budget and so will receive almost \$17 million dollars. The U.S. annual contribution to UNESCO will fall from between \$43 and \$50 million to about \$25 million. How is this unrestrained budgetary growth?

The U.S. government said, nonetheless, that UNESCO had net program growth. That is true, but it has not cost the U.S. more money. The administration has said that it does not want to set a precedent of a six percent growth rate. It could have handled the problem by proposing a resolution which would provide that this exceptional situation not set a precedent for future budgets.

What was the real reason for the U.S. withdrawal, then?

CHALLENGOR: What we are facing is a retreat from multilateralism. If one looks at the decisions not to ratify the Law of the Sea Treaty and to cut the U.S. contribution to the seventh replenishment of the International Development Agency (IDA), one sees that the U.S. commitment to multilateralism is eroding at a time of greater interdependence in the world. Syndicated columnists like William Buckley and George Will have asked why the U.S. should stop with UNESCO, but this country cannot afford to be interventionist militarily and politically while being isolationist in terms of cooperation among nations in solving global problems. The contemporary world has seen an end to territoriality in a number of areas. Environmental problems do not respect boundaries. Health is an international problem because diseased people cross borders. A U.S. retreat from multilateralism will create problems for generations to come.

A number of charges have been lodged against UNESCO since the announcement of the withdrawal. It is said that the staff is overpaid. There are charges of nepotism in hiring practices. One account indicated that the 22nd General Congress decided that 700 of the 900 posts subject to geographical distribution will go to the developing countries. Would you comment on these allegations?

CHALLENGOR: UNESCO policy on salaries grows out of a 1920 League of Nations decision that salaries for International Civil Servants be slightly higher than those of the best paid civil servants of the member states. They did not want members of the highest paid civil service to be discriminated against because they joined a UN agency. If one looks at UNESCO salaries, one finds that they are very much in line with those of the U.S. civil service.

The UN system has a concern for geographic distribution in recognition of the need for all member states to be adequately represented, based on the percentage of their contribution. The U.S., the largest contributor, pays 25 percent of the budget and has 89 professionals in UNESCO while the Soviet Union, the second largest contributor, pays 12.9 percent and has 37 professionals. During its first twelve years, the UNESCO Director General or Deputy General was an American. The Assistant Directors General now are American, Soviet, and French. The decision taken at the General Conference to reserve 700 of the 900 professional posts for developing countries stems from the fact that some of these countries are not represented at all on the UNESCO professional staff. The organization has decided that every member state, regardless of its percentage of contribution, ought to have a quota of eight persons working in the

Secretariat.

The allegation of nepotism stems from the charge that the Director General has hired more Africans, but he has hired Africans as he has hired others. As more member states come into the organization, they have a claim on certain posts because of the equitable geographic distribution principle. Naturally, those new member states have tended to be African, Asian, and Caribbean. An effort has been made to hire persons from these regions because they have a right to have membership in the Secretariat.

What benefit does the U.S. derive from its membership in UNESCO? Why should it stay in?

CHALLENGOR: First, the U.S. should stay in because it is the principal actor in the international community, and it has an interest in participating in *any* international organization. Second, UNESCO is the forum for ideas. We live in a world where ideas are often political. This country's ideas are important and ought to be articulated within the international forum.

Third, membership in UNESCO has certain more tangible benefits. UNESCO provides \$2 million in fellowship assistance to persons that study at American universities every year. Approximately fifty percent of all UNESCO fellows study in the U.S., Great Britain, and France. The U.S. pre-eminence in UNESCO's science and educational programs creates markets for our scientific and educational goods and materials. UNESCO has a coupon program which reimburses persons who want to sell educational materials, books, and audio-visuals to developing countries which do not have convertible currencies. Of course, the U.S. is the largest seller of books and other educational materials in the world, and the UNESCO copyright convention protects U.S. exports that amount to \$1 billion a year. Fourth, over the past ten years, over 2,000 Americans have participated in UNESCO programs as paid consultants, as persons attending our meetings, as advisors on operational activities in the field, and as writers for UNESCO publications.

Fifth, the U.S. will lose participation in the international exchange of academics and researchers in UNESCO's fields of competence. The organization has fifteen intergovernmental committees in the fields of culture, science, and education that discuss global issues in which the U.S. has an interest. Because UNESCO works with the Ministers of Culture and Education of its member states, very often these discussions have a direct impact on government policy. Thus, the U.S. will lose an opportunity to advance some of its own programs and its own values within the system if it withdraws. □

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To Our Readers:

TransAfrica Forum Issue Brief was designed to be a monthly publication focusing on a single topic and covering in-depth the eventful and important foreign policy questions of our times. We have attempted to cover the evolving issues in the last several months—Chad, Nicaragua, Grenada, South Africa. However, because of the extensive research required and our limited resources, publication of the Issue Brief henceforth will be bi-monthly.

WHAT IS UNESCO?

"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed."

UNESCO Constitution

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is one of the seventeen specialized agencies of the United Nations system. Founded in 1945 and beginning its work in 1946, UNESCO has perhaps the broadest scope within that system. As such, the organization has been described as the "conscience" of the UN system; but because its scope is so broad, it has been less well understood. The purpose of UNESCO is to "contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science, and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law, and for human rights . . . without distinction of race, sex, language, and religion. . . ." UNESCO proposes to build "defenses of peace" by facilitating the free flow of ideas and culture across international frontiers.

It is education which is UNESCO's principal vocation. The organization's first task was the reconstruction of schools that were destroyed during World War II and the de-Nazification of the curriculum in the occupied territories of Europe. Later, UNESCO became concerned with the provision of universal primary education. In Latin America, for example, UNESCO was involved in the training of teachers and building of primary schools. UNESCO is perhaps best known for its literacy work; and between 1979 and 1983, it was involved in making fifteen million people literate. In 1980 alone, the organization trained more than 30,000 school teachers.

UNESCO's science programs, which account for nearly a quarter of the organization's budget, also are extremely important. The best-known program, "Man and the Biosphere," involves 1,000 research projects in 75 countries and 200 biosphere reserves around the world. In addition, UNESCO supports intergovernmental programs which bring scientists together to work in specific fields of interest and provides more than 4,000 fellowships to scientists.

UNESCO's cultural activities are better-known and are highly regarded. The Acropolis, the city of Venice, the Citadel in Haiti, and the Borobudur in Indonesia are all UNESCO restoration projects. The organization currently is involved in twenty-nine cultural campaigns for which it has mobilized over \$40 million. A nine-volume general history of Africa currently being prepared under UNESCO auspices is the first history of Africa done largely by Africans. In the area of the social sciences, UNESCO has worked in the fields of Human Rights and Human Rights education, the role of women in development, and peace and disarmament.

In the information field, UNESCO administers the Florence Convention passed in 1954. This is the principal international copyright convention which protects the rights of authors of books and films. Because of these copyright measures, more than \$1 billion in U.S. sales are protected throughout the world. In addition, the organization is very interested in the development of libraries and documentation centers and in the standardization of information networks available throughout the world.

UNESCO is a major publisher and produces over three hundred book titles a year, which are widely disseminated. For each of its major fields of activity, the organization pub-

lishes a journal, including: *Prospects*, an educational journal; *Impact*, a science journal; and *The Courier*, a general public information journal available in twenty languages.

Officials of UNESCO maintain that the ethical role of the organization transcends political ideologies. Nonetheless, UNESCO's allocation of resources and establishment of priorities reflect the global political climate of particular eras. Membership in UNESCO has grown from the 28 founding states to 161 member states, 3 associate member states, the Vatican, and 4 liberation movements today. When UNESCO was formed, fifteen of its members were from Europe, the British Commonwealth, or North America. Therefore, the initial outlook of the organization reflected the strong influence of the Western cultural tradition. When UNESCO's membership had grown to seventy-two after the Soviet Union and other socialist countries joined by the mid-1950s, a second perspective was then added to the organization's outlook. With the rise of the decolonization process, a third cultural perspective was incorporated as a large number of formerly dependent territories in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean attained national sovereignty and entered into multilateral fora.

Today, as in all multilateral organizations, it is the nations which were former colonies that comprise the majority of UNESCO's member states. Inevitably, the policies and actions of UNESCO are affected by the composition of its members and the prevailing ideas that affect their opinions. The entire United Nations system, including UNESCO, has changed because the world as a whole has changed. Certainly, these changes are reflected in changes in the subjects of immediate concern to UNESCO and in the programs the organization has adopted.

It is important to note that UNESCO is an organization composed of States and that its governing bodies are intergovernmental. This, of course, explains why the debates among the various delegations reflect different world views; and this has *always* been the case. In the 1940s the U.S. move to make the organization a "political instrument of the Cold War" was resisted by some of the other member states. Later U.S. attempts to win active support within UNESCO for the UN action in Korea also created concern. That these kinds of debates continue—though the substance of the particular issues may have changed—should not be at all surprising.

Spokespersons for Western interests publicly have accused those nations which were former colonies of manipulating UNESCO and other multilateral organizations through a "tyranny of the majority." These accusations are ironic given the fact that the organization seeks to resolve all controversial issues by consensus in order to compensate for the different political strengths of the "political majority" (the more powerful states) and the "numerical majority" (the more numerous developing countries). This process of decision-making through consensus in effect grants a veto power to the minority. In 1974 UNESCO's Director-General created the Drafting and Negotiating Group (DNG) which negotiates controversial resolutions at the General Conference. As a result, of the 134 resolutions considered during the 1983 General Conference, for example, 132 were approved by consensus and only 2 were put to a vote. Despite the significant diversity of peoples and viewpoints represented within UNESCO, the organization has attempted to fulfill the ideals embodied in its Constitution to the fullest extent possible through a full airing of differing perspectives. □

"I think that the symbol of United States withdrawal from UNESCO goes far beyond UNESCO itself and the issues that we complain about within that body. It's saying to the world that the United States is not going to take on international responsibility. It's saying to the world that when things don't go perfectly our way, we're going to be poor losers."

Rep. Jim Leach (R-Iowa), House
Subcommittee on Human Rights and
International Organizations

On December 28, 1983 the Reagan administration gave the required one-year notice of its intention to withdraw U.S. membership in UNESCO. A withdrawal letter by Secretary of State George Shultz and an official news briefing by Assistant Secretary of State Gregory Newell each listed three alleged transgressions committed by UNESCO as justification for the withdrawal: unrestrained budgetary growth and mismanagement; politicization of programs; as well as a "statist" approach and hostility toward Western values and institutions.

The sequence of events preceding the U.S. withdrawal notification are as follows:

- Soon after assuming office, the Reagan administration ordered a reappraisal of more than ninety multilateral organizations.
- In June 1983 the State Department undertook a "fundamental reappraisal" of the U.S. role in UNESCO.
- On October 27, 1983 at the start of UNESCO's General Conference in Paris, USIA Director Wick gave a highly critical speech warning UNESCO that the U.S. intended to push strongly for certain changes.
- At the end of the General Conference, the chairman of the U.S. delegation reported that the U.S. had "won" on six issues and cited as its two "losses" the decision to hold the next General Conference in Bulgaria and the budget adoption.
- Subsequently, the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO approved a resolution strongly opposing withdrawal by a vote of forty-one to eight.
- At the December 28, 1983 press briefing, Assistant Secretary Newell reported that the "fundamental reappraisal" had concluded that withdrawal was the best option and that the reappraisal report would be made available within two weeks.

While its displeasure with UNESCO is hardly feigned, the administration has yet to publicize the real reasons behind its decision to withdraw. Indeed, the following four concerns have played a much larger role in shaping the administration's attitude and actions toward UNESCO than it has been willing to admit publicly. First, for the administration, a very real dilemma exists concerning financial clout versus the sharing of decision-making power in multilateral organizations. Should power be shared according to the abil-

ity to pay (like the World Bank or the IMF) or should democratic principles of one participant, one vote (like the UN General Assembly) be followed? In international relations where individual states openly pursue conflicting interests and goals, this becomes an even more vexing problem. The industrialized countries, because they no longer constitute the majority of member states, favor linking power with funding responsibility and want to change the system they created. It is very revealing that Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams has said publicly of UNESCO: "We are pulling out. They are free to criticize us, but we sure as hell don't have to pay for it." What administration officials fail to note is the fact that the U.S. recaptures nearly forty percent of its contribution to UNESCO through the organization's expenditures.

The administration's second concern is related quite naturally to the first. The Reagan administration has very little appetite for multilateral diplomacy. This has been the case especially since the 1960s when the African independence movement established an overwhelming majority of poor nations which are vocally critical of international arrangements that they see as the causes of their poverty and powerlessness.

The remaining two reasons are of a less permanent nature and are more related to current circumstance: election-year politics and discomfort with M'Bow. Foreign affairs remains a vulnerable area for Reagan in his reelection bid. In this context, the UNESCO withdrawal is partly a Reagan concession to the Republican right wing, which has berated Reagan for not "being Reagan." Some conservative columnists have gone so far as to suggest that the U.S. invasion of Grenada and the withdrawal from UNESCO are the *only* bright spots in Reagan's foreign policy.

Finally, the Reagan administration has little regard for UNESCO Director General M'Bow. Interestingly enough, the State Department has been scrupulously careful in not casting public aspersions against M'Bow's character. On the contrary, both Newell and Shultz, in announcing and justifying the withdrawal decision, have praised M'Bow. This rather effusive public praise for the chief executive of a "culprit" organization creates a suspicion which is strengthened when one examines, even cursorily, the criticism leveled at UNESCO in non-official Western circles. In published attacks in American, British, and French newspapers and magazines, M'Bow has been accused of being arrogant and haughty especially in dealing with the U.S. delegation; of being leftist and too friendly with the communist bloc; and of being dictatorial, greedy, and inordinately ambitious.

Whatever the reasons for the withdrawal decision, there is very little question that it is an important decision which merits more open discussion. Predictably, the administration's action has generated a storm of reactions. Although the Republican right wing has applauded the withdrawal, others have argued that despite UNESCO's flaws, it is in the U.S. interest to remain in the organization and push for change. An American withdrawal will damage long-term U.S. interests, they point out.

Director General M'Bow has pledged full cooperation with an independent review of UNESCO operations, which should be completed this summer, to be conducted by the General Accounting Office (GAO). Hopefully, this investigation will provide an objective assessment of the merits of the Reagan administration's case against UNESCO and result in a more appropriate U.S. response to the situation. □

"While other countries try to reach the moon, we are still trying to reach villages."

Julius Nyerere, President of Tanzania

A principal factor in the controversy concerning UNESCO is the debate over the New World Information and Communications Order (NWICO). The Western press and the Reagan administration label the NWICO a dire threat, which would license and impose restrictions on journalists, and point the finger of blame directly at UNESCO. In November at the end of UNESCO's General Conference, the Overseas Press Club of America called the NWICO proposals "an insult, degrading" and a forerunner of "totalitarian brainwashing and mind control." But the fact is that UNESCO—prevailing opinion notwithstanding—did *not* initiate the debate, has *no* power to enforce the NWICO, and has *never* called for the licensing of foreign journalists.

Although only about seven percent of UNESCO's budget is spent on its communications programs, since 1972 the organization's activities in this area have been the source of greatest contention. In 1972 in response to a request from journalists, UNESCO formed the International Commission on the Study of Communication Problems, composed of sixteen members appointed by the Director General and chaired by the distinguished journalist Sean MacBride.

The MacBride Commission's findings have fueled the debate concerning the NWICO. The currently held—but false—view is that the MacBride Report advocated the licensing of journalists and the restriction of the free flow of information. In fact not one of the eighty-two recommendations of the final report advocates licensing. While the call for the licensing of journalists was precipitated by a concern for their welfare in covering stories in dangerous situations, the report states that "the Commission does not propose special privileges to protect journalists in the performance of their duties, although journalism is often a dangerous profession." Moreover, the report argues that "all countries should take steps to assure admittance of foreign correspondents and facilitate their collection and transmission of news."

Among the issues the MacBride Commission discussed were the implications for the developing countries of the latest technological developments. It noted that the modern concept of information includes more than mere news flow, but the full gamut of data transmission. Privately-held, specialized networks now control sixty to seventy percent of the market for exporting information by computer and maintain a near monopoly on scientific-technological capacity. With computerized data banks, satellites can detect information and resources that the country in question is unable to discern and can obtain only from the transnational owner of the equipment. Most Third World countries must import even the paper, ink, and equipment needed to publish newspapers and lack an industrial or retail sector large enough to stimulate commercial advertising. Therefore, only the public sector has the capacity to take an active role in establishing and maintaining even the print media. Yet spokespersons for the West, criticized the MacBride Commission for failing to stress the importance of the private sector and for promoting a "statist approach" to information and the press.

The MacBride Commission also focused on what has commonly become known as the techniques of disinformation: the direct exclusion of words, phrases, or incidents;

the subjective manipulation of language; the implicit misrepresentation of statements or events; preconditioning; overemphasis of unimportant anecdotes; and the distortion of contexts—to create a particular impression.

There can be no question that biased Western coverage of the Third World does occur and is widespread. Just one African instance will serve to exemplify this. Reporter David Lamb of the *Los Angeles Times* writes of Africa, "No continent has been more mistreated, misunderstood, and misreported over the years than Africa." And yet he makes the following contributions to what his colleagues have done:

Only Gabon . . . has managed to achieve population stability—largely because thirty percent of the women have venereal disease . . .

Where a European couple might kiss, Africans copulate . . .

Below the paper-thin veneer of civilization in Africa, lurks a savagery that waits like a caged lion for an opportunity to spring . . .

Ironically, around the turn of the century, the American press—now so hostile to the NWICO—severely criticized the dominant international news agencies for painting a distorted picture of American life in which racial incidents, segregation, and lynchings were given too much coverage. This is, essentially, the concern of the developing countries. UNESCO, through the discussion of the NWICO, is simply trying to address it.

In each of its resolutions on communications and information, UNESCO has been consistent in its calls for a freer and more balanced flow of information. In 1980 the resolution of the Twenty-first General Conference set forth eleven elements of a new world information order. Among its recommendations were:

- Elimination of the imbalances and inequities which characterize the present situation.
- Elimination of the negative effects of certain monopolies, public or private, and excessive concentrations.
- Removal of the internal and external obstacles to a free flow and a wider and better balanced dissemination of information and ideas.
- Plurality of sources and channels of information.
- Freedom of the press and information.
- Freedom of journalists and all professionals in the communication media, a freedom not inseparable from responsibility.
- The capacity of developing countries to achieve improvement of their own situations, notably by providing their own equipment, by training their personnel, by improving their infrastructures and making their information and communication media suitable to their needs and aspirations.
- The sincere will of developed countries to help them attain these objectives.
- Respect for each people's cultural identity and for the right of each nation to inform the world about its interests, its aspirations, and its social and cultural values.
- Respect for the right of all peoples to participate in international exchanges of information on the basis of equality, justice, and mutual benefit.
- Respect for the right of the public, of ethnic and social groups, and of individuals to have access to information sources and to participate actively in the communication process.

These recommendations hardly seem to justify the tremendous controversy that has raged concerning UNESCO and the NWICO. □

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TRANSAFRICA FORUM is a quarterly journal of opinion on matters pertaining to Africa and the Caribbean. The journal presents an independent review of differing perspectives on political, economic and cultural issues affecting black communities globally. The intent of the journal is to provide an expanded analytical framework which can be useful to a broad audience with a continuing commitment to African and Caribbean advancement.

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