

United States in UNESCO

Withdrawal sanctioned by default

Washington

AN independent panel appointed to monitor the activities of the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has failed to find persuasive reasons why the United States should reverse its decision to withdraw from the organization at the end of this year. A final decision on US participation in 1985 must be made within the next two weeks, and barring an unexpected change of heart by the State Department, the withdrawal will go ahead as announced at the end of 1983.

The US decision was made because of management inefficiency at UNESCO and "politicization" of its programmes. The monitoring panel, chaired by Dr James Holderman, chairman of the US National Commission on UNESCO and president of the University of South Carolina, makes no specific recommendation on the question of withdrawal. However, its conclusions are thought not to be so compelling as to demand the positive action required to abort withdrawal at this late stage.

UNESCO has made a number of changes over the past year that go some way to answering the US criticisms. The most important, from the US point of view, was the recent agreement to freeze the 1986-87 budget at the 1984-85 level, a move long demanded by the Reagan administration. Furthermore, some of the more ideologically inspired language used to describe UNESCO ambitions on disarmament and human rights has been toned down, and new efforts have been made to evaluate programmes, both actions that indicate some sensitivity to US concern. But recently agreed management reforms are not thought by the United States to go far enough and there is considerable scepticism about how rapidly and effectively the agreed changes will be implemented.

Despite the partial successes, however, the United States has failed totally to bring about changes in the voting structure at UNESCO, and was deserted by its Western allies on this issue. As in other United Nations organizations, there is one vote per country, even though financial contributions are in proportion to countries' gross national products. The US contribution, at \$47 million, amounts to one quarter of UNESCO's total budget. Although UNESCO officials express confidence that programmes will continue even if the withdrawal does go ahead, the impact will be serious — especially if other countries follow the US lead. Britain and West Germany are wavering.

A separate assessment of how UNESCO has accommodated US demands is being undertaken by two subcommittees of the House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs

Committee, under Representatives Gus Yatron and Dan Mica. This assessment will not however be complete before February, and so will not bear on the withdrawal decision. In any event, the executive decision to withdraw would not easily be swayed by a congressional report. At one stage, the possibility was considered that the United States might delay its withdrawal by one year, which would bring it neatly to the end of a UNESCO biennial programme cycle, but that option has now been definitely discounted by Gregory Newell, Assistant Secretary for international organization affairs at the State Department.

The US decision had dismayed many who were working on scientific projects administered by UNESCO, which were thought to be largely innocent of the faults levelled at other programmes. The National Academy of Sciences earlier this year



produced a favourable assessment of the scientific benefits obtained through the agency. But the State Department maintains that in most instances US scientists will be able to continue their involvement with UNESCO programmes even after withdrawal, despite the lack of US representation at council level: domestic expenditure on the Man and the Biosphere programme, for example, is scheduled to be doubled or tripled over the next few years.

The State Department says it is also looking for ways to encourage technological development in developing countries that do not rely on UNESCO. How far these aims prove possible will depend on the seriousness they are accorded by the Office of Management and Budget, and on the willingness of UNESCO to cooperate after being jilted by its biggest paymaster.

Tim Beardsley

West German forests

Damage survey looks bad

Munich

THIS year's inventory of damage to West German forests, the first results of which were published earlier this month, shows further deterioration since last year. A half of all forested areas are now believed to be affected to some degree, compared with 34 per cent in 1983. But as yet there are no reports of forest areas in which the damage is complete.

The Forest Damage Inventory now completed was initiated by the federal government in Bonn, and is the third of a series begun in 1982. For the first time, the survey was based on a nationwide system of 4 km × 14 km plots. This year, however, the classification was refined so as to include five categories of damage (rather than three), numbered 0 (undamaged) to 3 (severely damaged) and 4 (dead).

The main criterion for assessing damage is the extent of loss of needles or leaves, with the discoloration of foliage a secondary consideration. The survey earlier this year was carried out by specially trained forestry personnel carrying colour photographs with which to check their observations.

Between 1983 and 1984, the most obvious change has been the increase of the proportion of West German forests in which the damage is classified as slight or moderately severe. Between the two most recent surveys there has also been a dramatic increase in the extent of damage in some degree to broad-leaved trees, with the percentage of affected beech trees increasing from 26 to 50 per cent between 1983 and 1984, and that of oak trees from 15 to 43 per cent.

In the latest survey, damage has been reported from throughout West Germany, but is most serious in the southern *Länder* of Bavaria and Baden-Wurtemberg. While the earlier surveys showed damage predominantly at high altitudes, the most recent survey shows damage everywhere.

As in previous years, the results of the forest inventory will not go undisputed. Although the methods used in 1984 have been more systematically applied throughout West Germany, the validity of needle loss as the main criterion for assessing damage is likely to remain controversial. But whatever is happening, there can be no dispute that the new type forest decline is increasing both in geographical extent and in severity.

Although the cause of the damage remains open to debate, in the past few years increasing attention has been paid to the importance of ozone in conjunction with other stressing factors as the chief agent of damage. So far, there have been no reports of forest tracts in which all trees have been killed.

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