

lems of securing the independence of academic institutions which, perforce, must be supported with public funds, deserve a more thorough international hearing than they have had. Even the handling of news on an international basis is a fit subject for discussion, contentious though it would be; UNESCO's fault so far is that it has sought to market a solution for a problem it has not bothered to define.

But changes along these lines would damage the few good things that UNESCO does at present; that is what the cautious will protest. Certainly UNESCO without an operating budget would be unable to provide the annual subvention that maintains the Paris headquarters of the International Council of Scientific Unions, the secretariat of the International Commission on Oceanography and the general drum-beating on behalf of the Man and Biosphere programme. But these are precisely those parts of UNESCO's present programme whose value is generally accepted and that will find support from their beneficiaries even if UNESCO vanishes without trace. UNESCO even as it is can take pride in having backed these good causes but can confidently leave their future in other hands, saving its energy for the more difficult tasks that remain untackled. UNESCO needs to become what it pretends it is already, an intellectual catalyst.

Reform, along lines such as these, would mean a UNESCO very different from what now exists. Ironically, it would also be an organization that spent an even greater proportion of its resources on itself, which only goes to show the United States and Britain are mistaken in complaining that one of UNESCO's present sins is that it spends too much on itself. That complaint starts from the premise that UNESCO is, or should be, yet another technical assistance agency of the United Nations. But there are too many of those already. What UNESCO should be is what it was designed to be, a cross between a kind of international academy of all the sciences and humanities and a body capable of knowing (and saying) what public policies would advance that cause. Present attempts to make UNESCO more efficient will push it in an opposite direction.

So the reformers should ask themselves afresh what tasks are implied by UNESCO's charter, what functions can be accomplished with a budget of the present size (or even smaller) and what machinery might serve the purpose. Their conclusion, no doubt, would be that a smaller group of people (few of whom would be drawn from the present bureaucracy) might, by canalizing the energies of far-sighted people in other jobs, perform an international public service on behalf of scholarship and culture. Having no money to spend (except, perhaps, on people's travelling expenses) would entail the beneficial conclusion that wrong-headed schemes such as the new information order could not be foisted on unwilling subscribers except with their consent. Britain and like-minded critics of the present regime, having made a fuss without quite knowing why, should not now pretend that the reforms on offer at Sofia are a sufficient response. Instead, they should demand that UNESCO must become what it was meant to be and then declare their willingness to stay to bring that end about. Pulling out is the easy option, which the member governments have made seem sensible by their indifference to what UNESCO has been up to all these years. The end of Mr M'Bow's present term of office two years from now should be a chance to put things right. □

Summit talking

Preparations for next month's summit meetings are getting out of hand.

THE blind date that has been arranged between President Ronald Reagan and Mr Mikhail Gorbachev at Geneva next month will be a strange affair. The objective is said to be that these two powerful politicians should find a way of cutting through the difficulties that at present divide them, especially on strategic arms control. But the two people have not previously met each other in the flesh, nor exchanged a single word of

conversation, civil or otherwise. In circumstances like these, the ideal would be that the blind date should be as little hedged about with restrictions as may be possible. It might even be better to agree in advance that no decisions will be made at this first meeting, but that there will be another in a few months or so. So why are the two men and their assistants apparently determined to have their conversation in advance, in public? And on specifying what they will or will not agree at Geneva in such detail that there will be precious little to talk about when they meet?

The most serious issues to have emerged from the torrent of public speaking in the past few weeks are three — the US plan to develop a defence against missiles (the Strategic Defense Initiative or SDI), the sanctity of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty (1972) and the development of anti-satellite weapons (one of which was tested for the second time by the United States last month). If some kind of understanding can be reached on these questions, there seems no reason why the patient negotiating teams also at Geneva should not be able to reach an agreement on something like the Soviet plan for a fifty per cent reduction of strategic warheads (but that will take time). Unfortunately the two sides are busily painting themselves into different corners by insisting on what they will not concede.

SDI is the most serious stumbling block, if only because so much has been said about it, but is clearly linked with the ABM treaty. The United States is right to insist that a ban on research is unverifiable and therefore unacceptable, which Mr Gorbachev appears to accept. But the United States is wrong to say (as the US Department of Defense said last week) that testing components of SDI would be compatible with the treaty provided that they were not complete weapons systems; one objective of the treaty was to prevent just the kind of development now in prospect. And it does not affect the integrity of the treaty to point to the recent development of anti-missile defences in the Soviet Union, as the US Secretaries of State and of Defense did in their detailed account of Soviet hardware put out last week; either these developments are compatible with the treaty (which allows the missile defence of Moscow) or they are violations, and they should be dismantled.

The way out of this fix is that the ABM treaty should be modified so as to allow the provision of better early-warning systems (see *Nature* 3 October, p.371) but otherwise reaffirmed. The problem of anti-satellite weapons should be dealt with in the same way. In 1972, when the ABM treaty was signed, the strategic importance of military remote-sensing satellites was not as evident as it has become. The case for making sure that one side cannot knock out the other's warning and communications systems is strong. So the ABM treaty should be amended to include an interdiction of the deployment of anti-satellite weapons. Testing should also be banned. But, the US State Department and the Pentagon say, the Soviet Union has already ground-based launching systems ready to be used against US satellites. The information is so specific as to be plausible, but the solution is simple: demand that the hardware in place should be destroyed and not rebuilt.

Steps like these seem reasonable enough, but it is a lot to ask that the summiters should take them when the general climate of the relationship between their two countries is at such a low ebb. And while an arms control agreement might reasonably be expected to contribute to better relationships, it is dangerous to hazard agreement in that vital field on the chance that next month's blind date will work out. The two concerned had better plan to talk about some less contentious issues as well. □

Biological manuscripts

Contributors are reminded that, with the transfer of the Biological Sciences Editor to the Washington office, they should in future send **four copies of all manuscripts** offered for publication either (as at present) to London or to Washington.