UNESCO finally elects a new director general

- Executive council elects Federico Mayor
- M'Bow support fails at final vote

Paris & Washington

UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) has nominated Federico Mayor Zaragoza, a Spanish molecular biologist, as its new director general. A majority consensus among the 50 delegates of the executive council was reached last Saturday evening (17 October) after the full five rounds of voting, lasting 10 days.

During the first four rounds, the incumbent director general, the controversial Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, of Senegal, remained in the lead, despite efforts by most Western member states to dislodge him (see *Nature* 329, 472; 1987).

M'Bow, who was encouraged to stand for a third term by UNESCO's third-world members, reluctantly agreed to quit the contest on Saturday.

The elections took an unexpected turn on 9 October when Sahabzada Yaqub Khan, the Pakistan candidate favoured by Western Europe, Canada and Japan, resigned from the contest after being runner-up in the first three rounds. Hopes by the anti-M'Bow lobby that Khan's votes would go to Mayor, giving him an overall majority, were upset when France (which retains close links with several African countries) decided to back M'Bow. It was only in the final, fifth round that France cast its vote for Mayor.

Squibb boosts Oxford pharmacology lab

London

THE US drug house E.R. Squibb is giving £20 million to the department of pharmacology at the University of Oxford to support established research into the chemical basis of disorders of the central nervous system. Richard Furlaud, chairman of Squibb, says the company is attracted by the quality of neuroscience research in Oxford, and that it recognizes the need for a rational basis for treating diseases such as Alzheimer's and schizophrenia.

Half of the money will be used to rehouse the department of pharmacology: the balance will support selected research projects over the next seven years, with a possible extension for a further five years. Researchers will not be unexpected to produce marketable products, but Squibb will retain the rights on discoveries with patent royalties going to the university.

Jennifer Altman

M'Bow's alleged mismanagement of funds and anti-Western bias led the United States then Britain and Singapore to withdraw from UNESCO in 1984 and 1985.

Mayor is a biochemist by training and carried out research at the University of

Federico Mayor, the new director general.

Oxford in the laboratory of Sir Hans Krebs. He is a strong supporter of funding for basic research but also a pragmatist who believes that politicians need to be taught what science can do for society. He became one of Spain's youngest professors when he was given a chair at the University of Granada at the age of 29. More recently, he provided the impetus, along with Nobel prizewinner Severo Ochoa, to set up Spain's main research institute, the Centre for Molecular Biology, at the Autonomous University of Madrid. Although he served briefly as Minister of Education in the 1970s, he has not been much favoured by the present socialist government. But he is known as a man with formidable political connections and is a friend of the King of Spain.

Speaking at a news conference in Paris on Saturday, Mayor said that he intends to restructure UNESCO and to encourage Britain, the United States and Singapore to rejoin the organization. Britain, however, has said that it would be at least two years before it would consider rejoining and, with the United States, it would expect to see major changes to the way UNESCO is run.

The executive council's nomination of Mr Mayor has still to be ratified at a full assembly of the 158 UNESCO members states on 14 November.

Peter Coles & Alun Anderson

Berlin's second Academy of Sciences opens

Munich

LEIBNIZ, the founder of Berlin's first Academy of Science in 1700, is a tough act to follow, but West Berlin's conservative city fathers have decided to try. They have founded the "Academy of Sciences at Berlin", an alternative to the Leibniz academy now located in East Berlin. The new academy opened to mixed reviews at its founding in the former Italian Embassy in Berlin's Tiergarten on 11 October.

Opposition politicians, such as Hans Kremendahl of the Social Democrats (SPD), consider the new academy nothing more than a 'debating club' or, worse still, a conservative think-tank, which the SPD would redesign from the ground up if given the chance.

Academy scientific director Helmut Meier refutes the SPD charges, saying that the academy is the more capable because its members are scattered "from Freiburg to Harvard". The new academy, which will ultimately expand to 60 members, is no "old men's discussion circle", he said, "occupied with a debate over whether June bugs have six legs or seven". Nevertheless, Meier agreed that the orientation of the academy "does not exactly fit SPD educational policy".

The academy, which will have a budget for 1988 of DM6 million, begins its work with 30 members in fields ranging from gerontology to energy. Its most innovative aspect is its structure, which calls for seven 'working groups' consisting of members both inside and outside West Berlin and West Germany, to tackle thorny conceptual problems. The groups themselves will have no facilities, but rather will rely upon the home institutes and research grants of members. The academy hopes, by pulling people together from different fields, to break down traditional barriers.

Initial topic areas include "the long-term chances of solar energy" and "ageing and society" as well as an analysis of the interactions between mathematics and physics in the field of string theory. The only topic with a specifically German focus will assess the impact on German science of the 1933 exodus of researchers from Berlin caused by the Nazis.

Until now, West Germany has had no national Academy of Sciences, although there are four regional academies and one "Academy of Arts, Sciences and Literature" in Mainz. The academy founded by Leibniz as the "Prussian Academy of Arts and Sciences" is now called the "Academy of Sciences of the German Democratic Republic", with a budget of 1,000 million East German marks.

Steven Dickman