

US pullout from UNESCO to bring budgetary crisis

PARIS Jan. 2:—A United States withdrawal from UNESCO would bring a budgetary crisis and sweeping cuts in the U.N. body's programmes from 1985 diplomats predicted says Reuter.

Such a decision would also represent a major personal setback for UNESCO Director-General Ahmadou Mahtar M'bow of Senegal who has used his nine-year tenure to champion Third World concerns.

UNESCO spokesman said Thursday M'bow was officially on holiday adding that the organisation would not comment on reports of the pullout.

The United States contributes a quarter of the agency's budget. Under UNESCO's rules the U.S. withdrawal will take effect in 12 months' time and would therefore strip UNESCO of 25 per cent of its funds for 1985.

Diplomats said the Reagan Administration could still reconsider the decision yet to be formally announced during the course of 1984 but said any change of mind would mean severe loss of face in Washington.

One source speculated that the only event which might keep the U.S. in UNESCO would be the resignation of M'bow whose mandate runs until 1987.

Diplomats say M'bow may have misunderstood the Reagan Administration's determination to make good its pull-out threat.

In the mid-1970s the U.S. withheld its contributions to UNESCO for a period after Israel came under attack within the organisation but there was no question of a full withdrawal.

UNESCO managed to overcome the two-year crisis with interest-free loans from Arab states but this option may be more difficult to follow now.

Diplomats said it would be up to M'bow to propose curbs in UNESCO spending and the axe would probably fall directly on its programmes rather than its permanent staff in Paris.

Americans working for UNESCO could also fail to have their contracts renewed as a side-effect of the American withdrawal although strictly speaking they are international civil servants rather than representatives of their countries.

Jean-pierre Cot a former French Cooperation Minister who now sits on UNESCO's Executive Board said U.S. charges of bad management and third worldism in the U.N. body were justified but commented. I doubt if the policy of the empty chair is an adequate response today.

France proud of its role as host nation for UNESCO urged Washington privately not to go ahead with its withdrawal threat.

Diplomats said Britain, West Germany and other western countries shared American disillusionment with UNESCO's record under M'bow but were unlikely to follow suit and withdraw.

UNESCO founded in Paris in 1946 with 20 members states and a budget of seven million dollars now has 161 members and its latest two-year budget for 1984-85 is for 374 million dollars.

Its founders gave it three main aims. 'To help in the advancement and spread of knowledge to give a vigorous impulse to the development of education and the spread of science to work for knowledge and mutual understanding among nations.'

Its achievements have included the rescuing of the Nubian Temples in Egypt from the

floodwaters of the Aswan high Dam and a string of literacy projects in the developing world.

Current programmes included studies on the earth's crust and the resources of the world's oceans the promotion of education for women and the training of teachers in the Third World.

But in the eyes of the U.S. and other western government such useful activities have been increasingly overshadowed by an expansion of UNESCO into fields where its activities are either superfluous or harmful.

These have included the promotion of a new world information and communications order seen by its western critics as a device for legitimising government control of the Press.

M'bow has rejected this charge saying political argument is inevitable in the highly charged areas where UNESCO operates.

He also believes that UNESCO is the only U.N. specialised agency which has a mandate to study world problems on a truly global basis with no aspects left out.

Critics of UNESCO say too little of its money is spent on practical programmes and too much on internal bureaucracy at its Paris headquarters where some 3,400 people work.

Over Harries a former Australian ambassador to UNESCO wrote in a study for the Washington-based Heritage Foundation a conservative think tank that UNESCO was a worst case model of the U.N. system.

Harries and other critics blame M'bow directly for UNESCO's problems accusing him of a dictatorial style which has led to low morale and inefficiency.

M'bow 62, was Senegal's Education Minister before coming to UNESCO in the 1960s and becoming Director-General in 1974. As the first African to head a major U.N. agency he made the most of near-automatic support from the African majority in UNESCO.

He says policy is decided by member states and he merely carries it out. But diplomats say he wields far more power over what UNESCO does than the heads of other U.N. agencies.

Even opponents acknowledge his masterly grasp of U.N. rules and procedure and accept the sincerity of his own commitment to human rights and freedom of information.

Diplomats say M'bow was once considered a possible candidate from Africa to succeed U.N. Secretary General Javier Pered de Cuellar but that the chances of such a move are now nil.

The U.S. withdrawal comes at a time when controversy within UNESCO over freedom of the Press and other issues appears to be on the wane. The organisation's six-week general conference in November was summed up by delegates as the quietest since 1974.