

UNESCO - UNITED KINGDOM

Extract of speech by the Minister for Overseas Development, the Hon. Timothy Raison in the House of Commons, 27 November 1984 *

I turn for a moment to the question of UNESCO. My right Hon. and learned friend announced in his speech the Government's decision to give notice that we will leave UNESCO at the end of next year. He made it clear that we shall be prepared to reconsider our position towards the end of next year in the light of the results of next October's general conference in Sofia, if substantial progress has been made in the areas which we have specified as in need of reform.

....let me stress that we hope that sufficient reform will be achieved, and that we shall play our full part in working for it - just as we have done over the past year, thanks largely to very hard work by our officials. We have been in the van of the reform movement, and we shall remain there. But the option of giving notice has always been clearly there, ever since my noble friend the Baroness Young spelt it out in another place on 25 January this year.

Many arguments have been put for and against particular courses of action. Our judgement is that the way we have chosen represents the best way of keeping up the pressure, while establishing the ability to make a clean break in a year's time if that finally seems right. It is our own decision, and certainly not one taken on the coat-tails of the United States. They have not pressurised us in any way, nor indeed have they played a full part in the reform movement, as we intend to do.

One thing strikes me strongly about the public debate on UNESCO: the defenders of the way in which UNESCO has been working have been few indeed...everywhere the need for reform is accepted, whether it be reform in its programmes, its operation, its politicisation, its management, its financing or its attitude towards free speech.

Have we made enough progress in dealing with those deficiencies? that is the question. There has been some progress, but there is still a long way to go. In many respects the crunch will come when promises are or are not turned into decisions by the time of next year's general conference. That is why we shall make our final review of the position after that conference has taken place.

*(The text of the speech was provided by the British High Commission, Canberra).