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## Politics and Unesco

The vote at the 18th general conference of Unesco to prevent admission of Israel to its European regional group, and the approval of a resolution requesting the Director-General not to extend small financial assistance to Israel, are not the way an organization should operate that was established to wipe out ignorance and prejudice. These actions mark a sad incident in the history of Unesco, and they represent what Dag Hammarskjöld called "illusory voting victories." Those of us who served on the delegations to the conference know how hard certain people worked to avoid these unfortunate actions.

Since the conference many members of the U.S. Congress, several Nobel laureates, groups of college presidents, scientists, and others have condemned most things Unesco stands for because of these two actions. Some of these statements and actions may show even poorer judgment than that exercised by certain delegations at the conference. The post-conference critics should have taken more time to understand and assess the events that occurred during the Unesco conference, for they were not acting under the pressures of a multilingual 135-nation conference.

Until this 18th conference, Canada, Israel, and the United States had not been assigned to any Unesco regional group, because of geographic location, because they preferred independence, or because of other factors. At this last meeting Canada and the United States were admitted to the European group, but not without some heated debate. Although the vote favoring Israel was tied on the first ballot and close on the second, the motion lost. Israel, however, can still attend any regional group. We hope that at the next general conference understanding and wisdom will prevail so that Israel will be able to vote in a regional group.

Criticism of Israeli archeological work in the Holy City during the debates in the commission dealing with cultural heritage may or may not have been justified. It was fanned by the current passion associated with the problems of the Middle East. Had certain delegates exercised leadership and statesmanship during the Paris meeting this whole matter could have been delayed until the United Nations reaches a decision about the special status of Jerusalem.

Scientists can be pleased that little or no national politics entered the debates and actions of the commission on science; possibly this is because science by its very nature recognizes no national boundaries. Many important, far-reaching, and worthwhile activities and programs were approved by this commission, including: (i) the Man and Biosphere Program, (ii) the Geological Correlation Program, (iii) a World System for Transmitting Information in Science and Technology or UNISIST, (iv) a modest subvention to help nongovernmental scientific unions that are members of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU), (v) support of the International Oceanographic Commission, and (vi) other highly significant programs concerned with teaching and research in the basic and applied areas of biology, chemistry, physics, and engineering as they relate to the ecological, earth, freshwater, and marine sciences.

The Unesco general conference elected a new Director-General who is dynamic, capable, and understanding of world problems. The science sector is in good and capable hands. Thus scientists are urged to give the secretariat a chance to demonstrate progress in handling the hundreds of worthwhile programs approved at the conference before condemning the entire organization because of two unfortunate actions at a general conference. If delegations learned even a little bit more about the meaning of international responsibility from their experience at this conference, perhaps at the next conference better reason, compassion, and cooperation will be demonstrated.—J. R. PORTER, *Department of Microbiology, University of Iowa, Iowa City 52242*