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John Roche

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UNESCO for Censorship

IF THE ANNUAL MEETING of the American Medical Association overwhelmingly endorsed a resolution supporting faith healings, it would create quite a stir. But at the moment, while the world yawns, the United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is engaged in a comparable exercise.

Set up in fancy quarters in Paris, UNESCO has the job of facilitating international understanding in the indicated professional areas. Ironically, it is in the process of voting for censorship.

THE SEQUENCE BEGAN when the Soviets learned to their horror that in the foreseeable future satellites might be capable of broadcasting direct signals to individual TV sets. In the words of Dr. Frank Stanton of CBS, "The capabilities of satellite communication are such that individual receivers may one day be able to supplement reception of locally originated signals with broadcasts direct from satellites 22,300 miles in the sky."

To Stanton, this was cheering news because such broadcasts "could make it possible for people in every corner of the earth to share in the free flow of ideas, the free communication of knowledge and information."

The Communists know a counter-revolutionary development when they see one, and immediately moved to exorcise the spectre of a "free flow of ideas." It is bad enough to have the Voice of America, the British Broadcasting Corporation, RIAS in Berlin, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty and Kol Israel invading their short-wave

sovereignty. But there at least you can set up the jammers — Soviet jamming of Western broadcasts is today more vigorous than ever, despite the atmosphere of detente.

On the UNESCO front the Soviets supported a "draft declaration of guiding principles on the use of satellite broadcasting for the free flow of information, the spread of education and greater cultural exchange." Needless to say, the guiding principle is censorship!

The U.S. Department of State really came out fighting . . . not, however, for the issue of freedom, but for a postponement of the matter until 1974. This heroic posture was voted down in the UNESCO commission on communications, which then turned to the merits.

By a vote of 47 to 9 this draft declaration of censorship was approved. (The roll of honor consisted of Britain, Canada, Switzerland, New Zealand, Costa Rica, Israel, Australia, Japan and the U.S.)

It is anticipated that the censors will get an even greater majority on the floor of the general convention of UNESCO. (Associated with this move toward TV censorship are resolutions calling for control of international news agencies and foreign correspondents.) According to the chief of the U.S. delegation to UNESCO, William B. Jones of the State Department, the United States is "deeply disturbed."

With all respect to Jones, the appropriate response is to get up, deliver a sharp defense of the principles of freedom . . . and walk out.