

Kwasniewski, Klaus

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Trouble with the UNEP

The western and eastern industrialised countries have so far derived little pleasure from the first UN organisation ever to have been set up in a developing country. After a few months of existence the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), with permanent quarters in Kenya's capital Nairobi, has already shown a tendency to develop into a mammoth organisation. The five-year fund, now at \$ 100 mn, is according to UNEP "clearly insufficient to carry out even a minimum of the wanted environmental activities".

The industrialised countries which put up almost all this money are feeling some concern at the prospect of constantly rising costs. It also seems to them disproportionate that close on 25 p.c. of the UNEP budget is spent on administration. The Federal Republic of Germany, which will bear about one-tenth of all the costs of the programme in its first five years, has therefore called for a cut by at least half in the administrative expenses. But there is little hope of this being done: a new building is being planned for UNEP even though the organisation enjoys excellent accommodation in the newly built Kenyatta conference centre.

UNEP's cost inflation, however, is not the only cause of worry for the industrialised countries. It emerged at the very first meeting of the Administrative Council that the industrialised countries and those of the Third World hold widely diverging

views on the contents of an environment protection programme. The developing countries which have a two-thirds majority on the Council have managed to "refunction" the priorities set at the big environment conference in Stockholm. The confrontation between North and South which had been expected on that occasion materialised in Nairobi, a year after Stockholm.

The developing countries have put human resettlement problems at the head of the list of priorities. They deferred items which were considered important by the industrialised countries, such as the data exchange system and industrial pollution, because they are of little interest to Third World countries in the early stage of technological development. Logically from their point of view, the developing countries have been trying to detach as much money as possible from other UNEP programmes to finance studies on cropland erosion, health and social welfare, and land cultivation and irrigation problems. One group of countries went so far as to demand a special \$ 240 mn fund to cope with settlement problems.

It need not cause surprise that demands of this kind were un-animously rejected by the industrialised nations, for they expect the UN measures on the environment to amount to more than a licence to finance huge construction and urban projects in developing countries. There are other UN organisations, like

UNDP, WHO, FAO and Unicef which engage in such projects as well as in health and social welfare and irrigation and cultivation problems. UNEP was until recently their "junior partner".

The western and eastern industrialised countries rightly judge protection of the environment to be primarily concerned with the world-wide problem of pollution by industrial waste. And this is a problem which cannot be solved in any way by building towns and settlements in Third World countries. It must in the first place be identified by exchange of information and then be solved by programmes against pollution of the environment by industry.

The developing countries would be well advised to desist from using UNEP — set up as an organisation for purposes of environment protection — for purposes exclusively connected with development or as an instrument for the creation of jobs merely because it happens to be located in a developing country. If the confrontation in UNEP goes on, the industrialised countries will sooner or later have to tackle the problem of pollution urgently through another organisation, for it brooks no delay. If that happens, UNEP will certainly for some time to come remain the only UN organisation with offices in a developing country far from the UN headquarters in Geneva and New York. The economic wisdom of choosing such a location is being questioned already.

Klaus Kwasniewski