

EDITORIAL

Reviewed internationally, the environmental policy scene sometimes appears very quiet. However, an in-depth look can paint a very different picture, and we should like to report on some such situations.

After seven years of tough negotiation, an agreement within UNCLoS seemed likely, and a convention acceptable to both North and South appeared ready to be signed. Then the news hit the conference like a bombshell – the United States, under the new administration, stated that it would review and analyze decisions already taken, and if necessary, seek a re-opening of the negotiations.

The developing countries reacted with bitterness and Western countries were aggrieved that they had not received prior notification of this move. Although some have since given to understand that they are not too unhappy, after all, about this development.

The main stumbling block, until then, had been seabed mining, which only big companies from the developed nations have the technical expertise and capital to exploit. But the developing countries see this from another perspective. The mining consortia, for their part, say that they need guaranteed access to the deep-sea sites for up to 30 years in order to recover their investments.

*The US move comes at a time when the developing countries are accusing eight of the industrialized nations of undermining the convention with a secretly negotiated agreement of their own on seabed use. The eight (USA, UK, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Japan, Belgium, Italy, Netherlands) passed, or are about to pass unilateral legislation of their own (see *Environmental Policy & Law*, 6 (3) (1980) p. 137 and *ibidem*, 7 (1) (1981) pp. 37, 39, 40). This group of so-called "like-minded states" first met in private in Washington in November 1980. A second "secret" meeting took place in January 1981 in Bonn, where the goal was to develop an agreed position on protection of investments and to establish reciprocal licensing agreements.*

*The national seabed mining laws all contain provisions that the basic principles of the LOS Convention would be respected and that these national provisions will be replaced by the UN Convention itself when it comes into force. But the Group of 77 condemns the unilateral laws (see *Environmental Policy & Law*, 7 (1) (1981) p. 33). For a report on events at the*

Environmental Policy and Law, 7 (1981)

tenth session and future prospects for the conference, see this issue page 54.

* * *

*We already mentioned in several editorials the big changes in the US that the Reagan administration has made in the field of environmental policy. To counteract these developments almost all of the environmental groups have been trying to build up membership and organize grass-roots support for the various programmes threatened by the budget cuts. Going even further, the Sierra Club has circulated a petition demanding that Interior-Secretary James Watt be fired (*Time*, 11 May 1981, p. 50) – and which in the first five weeks has received 80,000 signatures.*

In the next issue we plan to include an overview of the situation in the US, covering not only the Department of the Interior, but also general policy decisions.

* * *

Much is expected to come out of the Governing Council of the United Nations-Environment Programme (UNEP). Extensive discussions will undoubtedly take place on the serious financial situations and the implications this has for the programme.

Readers will notice that the annual report of the meeting is being presented this year in two parts: this issue reports on the papers submitted to the GC for its consideration, as far as these have been received. There are always some documents which are late and these will be included in the next issue together with the report on the plenary and sessional committee discussions. Perhaps this new approach at presentation will help to make more transparent the complicated procedure encountered by the delegates at the meeting.

* * *

Too late for publication this time, were the results of the 36th session of the Senior Advisers to ECE governments on Environmental Problems. A report is being prepared for inclusion in the next issue.