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HON. PRESIDENT: Robert J. Keller
EDITOR: Pierre-Michel Béguin

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COMMENT

SWITZERLAND PRESENT AT THE UNCTAD CONFERENCE

A Swiss team led by Ambassador F. Rothenbühler joined 3,000 other delegates at the third United Nations Conference on Trade and Development at Santiago, in Chile. The last such conference took place in Geneva in 1964. It was then that the "wealthy" countries agreed to strive towards devoting one per cent of their national product in public aid to the third world. Few countries have even approached this figure. The average ratio being 0.37 per cent for all industrialised countries. Switzerland was at the bottom of the list with sacrificing 0.16 per cent of her national income. Naturally, a much higher volume of aid was channelled through private undertakings. On this score, Switzerland was probably the leading nation. But private "aid" has the primary effect of increasing the debt of poor countries (it has grown from 21 billion to 53.4 billion dollars from 1961 to 1968). Because capitalist assistance must by its very nature, retrieve profitable returns.

In March of last year, the Federal Chambers agreed to increase the volume of public aid. Over a three year period, 400 million francs will be devoted to financial aid (low interest loans or non-repayable loans), 275 million to technical assistance and supplementary credits to humanitarian aid. There has therefore, been a distinct improvement in the level of public aid which has been brought to 0.3 per cent of G.N.P., and a growing awareness of the material injustice in the world.

Before leaving for Santiago, Ambassador F. Rothenbühler received a

letter from the Committee of the "Association of Sponsors of the Berne Declaration", a group of citizens who pledged two years ago to give away three per cent of their personal income to help fight under development. The letter raises many highly topical points. It asks of the Swiss delegate to UNCTAD to promote the following objectives: Switzerland should lead the way, and not wait for the initiative of other industrialised countries to stabilise the price of overseas raw materials such as cocoa; the agricultural exports of third world countries to Europe should not be impeded by high tariff barriers, Switzerland should give the same preferences to the exports of these countries as it does to those of the EEC, i.e., it should abolish barriers for industrial goods altogether.

Other points raised by the letter are: The capital flowing from poor countries to rich countries (debt repayment, dividends and transfer of private capital in European banks) should be deduced from the figures relating to private aid; poor countries should take part in negotiations on international monetary matters, Switzerland should pledge to increase its public aid.

At the time of writing, the UNCTAD Conference was about to begin. Western delegates were expecting an onslaught from the militant members of the group of 96 countries classified as "under developed". These will raise several key issues which the industrialised nations have come to accept, such as: Improving the terms of trade for commodities and raw materials; give a chance to the industrial exports of developing countries; re-allocate special drawing rights in their favour; give them a say in international monetary decisions alleviate conditions of financial assistance and "untie" the loans which are made to these countries; finally, adhere to the UNCTAD resolution of spending one per cent of GNP in public aid to the third world.

Young people in Switzerland and elsewhere (but particularly in Switzerland) are acutely aware of the problems of the third world and entirely agree to the above list of priorities. This may well induce the establishment to do something about it with a higher sense of urgency. Switzerland, the third richest nation in the world, is directly concerned, morally and practically, with the problems of poor countries.

Nevertheless Switzerland and the "rich" countries have their problems too (think of Great Britain) and however they help the third world, there will have to be a measure of *sacrifice*. Basically, nations have to consider themselves as *neighbours* in the Christian sense and be willing to sacrifice their interests for others. This is the meaning of "solidarity". Although it may conflict with notions of "*Real Politik*". (PMB)

SWISS EVENTS

FEDERAL

Federal Commission on Consumer Protection

An enquiry set up by the Federal Council as the upshot of a "minor question tabled in Parliament has come out with its report. A Bernese Socialist delegate, Mr. Mueller, had asked the Government to seek a solution to the problem created by a non-uniform practice of a remunerating service in Swiss restaurants. The Federal Commission on Consumer Protection, entrusted with the enquiry, came out with the following results:

Although more and more Swiss restaurants include service in their bills, the system of tipping is still predominant in the country.

Just as any other buyer, a restaurant patron has the right of knowing clearly what price he has to pay. It is thus necessary to arrange for a uniform system as customers tend increasingly to move from one part of Switzerland to another. This uniformity can be achieved either by returning completely to the former practice of tipping or abandoning it altogether and have a fixed percentage reserved for service. As the former solution does not appear feasible, the Commission recommends that tips should henceforth be banned. As long as this system is not generalised, all menus should clearly state whether meals are to be paid with or without service.

Employers and employees of the catering and hotel trade should together work out the means of wage payment within the new system. A waiter should not be earning less after the abolishment of tips. If this were the case, a possible solution would be to award him a fixed salary equal to the difference between his earnings before and after the introduction of the service-included system.

Finally, the Commission feels justified in recommending a generalisation of such a system as the evidence shows that, where service has been included in the bill, restaurant owners have not taken the opportunity to raise their profit margins unduly.

The Government's 1972-75 Programme

For the second time in its history the Federal Council has published a four-year programme, outlining the seventy odd messages and the fifteen constitutional amendments in every