

New law for development aid

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1973)**

Heft 1658

PDF erstellt am: **30.06.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-688998>

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100,000 "POISONOUS" GOODS ON THE SWISS MARKET

Following a new law enforced on 1st April, all consumer products officially classified as "toxic", and there are a hundred thousand of them, will be sold under five categories with distinctive labels. The new law standardises sales practises which varied from canton to canton.

Many common household goods such as salt, adhesive tape, shoe polish and cleaning powder falls under category No. 5, which is the least toxic. These goods will be allowed unattended sale in supermarkets but all carry a red label warning the buyer of potential dangers. Other goods such as turpentine, weed killer, presenting somewhat greater risks, will carry the same label but no longer be allowed in supermarkets. They will have to be sold over a counter. Category No. 4 includes low concentration chlorine and various mild chemicals which will only be on sale on demand, and forbidden to children. They carry a yellow label. Category No. 3, which covers strong pesticides, detergents for piping etc., will require an identity document and full details of the buyer's home address. The dealer is held to take back unemptied recipients or packages containing these products. Categories 2 (hydrochloric acid) and 1 (warfarine, cyanide) are marked with a dead man's skull and a visible warning of danger. They are respectively sold with a communal and cantonal voucher. Some of the products falling under these two lethal categories had up to now been sold freely. Benzene, for example, will no longer be sold to private individuals but only to specialists or firms with the required authorisation.



SUCCESS OF NORDIC SKIING

Nordic skiing has gained tremendous popularity during the past four years. Nobody could have foreseen this development when Mr. Roger Bonvin, minister for transports and communications, opened in 1970 the first Nordic ski-run in the Franches Montagnes, a plateau in the Jura traditionally specialised in horse breeding. Now there are 22 separate runs covering over 200 kilometres in the area. The tracks are amply delimited with sign-posts and mileage signs. Nordic or cross-country skiing (as contrasted to Alpine skiing) is akin to rambling in the snow and has won over innumerable people more attracted by the "being in nature" than by the physical element of skiing.

In summer, the Franches Montagnes area provides for admirable horse rides for children and adults alike. A great effort is being made to prepare tracks and to separate riders from motor traffic. It should help to make the region a Swiss horseriders' paradise within a year or two.

NEW LAW FOR DEVELOPMENT AID

Swiss development aid should change significantly. Mr. Pierre Graber announced sweeping reforms in its structure, organisation and volume.

A new law on "co-operation and humanitarian aid" will place Switzerland's help to third-world countries on a legal footing. Secondly, the foreign minister announced a forthcoming reorganisation of the implementation of this aid. Hitherto, both the Political Department (foreign affairs) and the Department of Economy had managed it. The work will now be shifted to the Political Department.

Most important of all, the volume of this aid will grow. Although Swiss private "aid" in the form of investments reached 0.83 per cent of national product in 1971, public funds, stemming from the tax-payer's money, reached only 0.11 per cent of G.N.P. The two figures put together amount almost to the one per cent of G.N.P. urged by the United Nations.

However, 1972 saw a significant increase as the relative value of public aid reached 0.2 per cent of G.N.P., or 235 million francs in absolute terms.

Consideration of the trade balance shows that Switzerland is getting richer at the expense of developing countries. In 1971, she exported 20.6 per cent of her production to these countries, and bought from them only 8.7 per cent of her imports! Furthermore, countries classified as "developing" include Spain, Yugoslavia, Brazil, Iran, Hong Kong and others which are relatively rich.

Swiss public aid is divided into technical aid (educational, agricultural projects, etc.), financial aid (granting of untied credits to developing nations), and investment-risk guarantees. Of this, only technical aid, which has a 400 million francs three-year budget, can be considered as a "pure gift". The other aid is in principle retrievable.

Switzerland joins with other industrialised countries in easing terms of trade to her poorer partners. Thus she adheres to the system of "generalised preferences" and to various agreements aiming at stabilising the price of vital export commodities.

To this must be added subscriptions to various U.N. humanitarian agencies and a fairly important Disaster Fund.

It is generally recognised that Switzerland's achievement in development aid lie in the *technical* field. The country is too small to launch vast programmes, but specialises in small projects (such as having watch makers and other craftsmen) which, it is hoped, will generate small industries and new talents.

The new law announced by Mr. Graber not only restructures Swiss development aid, it stresses that this aid should be "useful". From the wording of the bill emerges a very Swiss tendency

not to spend money in vain. Various guidelines will be laid down as to when and where a project can be considered as worthwhile. The history of development aid is rife in failure. Only by an intelligent assessment of the local situation, of the degree of goodwill and help offered from governments concerned, is it possible to bet safely on the success of a project in which millions may have to be spent. The new law purports to favour such assessments, and make sure that foreign aid is rational. This of course may prove difficult, as the African and Asian natives concerned may not necessarily have the same logic as a Swiss business manager.

A New Trade Union Leader

The Swiss Trade Union Congress (*Union Syndicale Suisse*) has elected a new President. He is Mr. Ezio Canonica, a socialist national councillor from Tessin. He was elected to a 114 to one majority. As a former chief of the country's building Union, he has worked predominantly among Italian workers and edited the Union's paper in Italian. He pledged, during a press conference after his election, that he would fight to improve the conditions of foreign labour and put an end to wages inequalities.

Regarding Switzerland's forty-year old "Peace of Labour", which has earned her industrial relations an excellent reputation, Mr. Canonica thinks that the climate of industry will inevitably change as the leadership of the Unions, actually fairly old, will have to be renewed. He added that Switzerland's involvement in Europe and the resulting ties with international corporations will have a bearing on Union commitments and thinking.

Thanks to the "Peace of Labour" and the general contentment of Swiss workers, who are among the highest paid in Europe, the Unions have had little "campaigning" to do. In fact, satisfaction has meant a tremendous loss of membership. All pay-claims and industrial decisions involving labour are discussed within an accepted procedural framework by management and the Unions. More often than not, the Unions condemn rare wildcat strikes by a fringe of (mainly foreign) workers, and stand with management.

It should be said that the Swiss T.U.C., as in Britain, is by no means the most militant grouping in Switzerland. The militants are found outside factories, in political caucuses. As in Britain, the engineering unions are more left-wing than others. But only the Labour (Communist) party openly calls for an overhaul of society, and an end to private industrial property.