

EDITORIAL

The social and employment problems in many areas are having an impact on several heads of Government, not least on German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. In a meeting with the labour unions and employer associations, which was concerned with the high tax burden, he stated that "with me there will be no eco-tax". This was a complete turn-about from a speech he gave at his party's annual conference in October 1995, when he had still voted in favour of a motion for an energy tax for CO₂ in Europe.

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We have still not brought the promised article on the influence that the new majority in the United States is having on environmental policy there for a simple reason : the situation is continually changing. But we have pencilled this in for the next issue.

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Representatives at the eleventh summit of non-aligned States in Cartagena, Colombia, said in their Final Document (see page 125) that they would endeavour to be more active in the field of trade and environment and the battle against poverty, drugs, terrorism and for technology transfer, and condemned the West for "interventionist and colonialist tendencies" which are on the increase. They are pressing for the revitalisation of North-South dialogue and South-South co-operation.

In the "Call from Colombia" (see page 129), which delegates from 115 States had discussed behind closed doors, there are calls, inter alia, for the democratisation of the United Nations, the restructuring of the international financial institutions and the implementation of promises made at various UN conferences.

Indonesia's President Suharto, up to now Chairman of the non-aligned States, said that they would no longer accept the fact that the West attached environmental or human rights conditions to trade relations.

We feel this statement to be not only surprising, but in contradiction to the first two points. Such conditions are not just of concern to Western countries and are important not only for questions of democracy but also for trade competition. Those States which refuse to take such aspects into consideration create unfair competition.

As the non-aligned are asking for the democratisation of the UN, they can hardly be against democracy in the national State or in trade.

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For years there has been a demand for the restructuring of UNCTAD. However, this was slowed down by the UN Secretary-General himself, who for the last four years made only provisional, short-term appointments to the head of the UNCTAD Secretariat. The new Secretary General, the Brazilian Rubens Ricupero, has been in office since September 1995. We feel that in the field of trade, environment and development, UNCTAD has recently accomplished very good work and we hope that UNCTAD IX, in the South African Midrand, will acknowledge this.

The prestigious "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" has said that the fact that UNCTAD has "here and there" undertaken good and even excellent work, should be recognised, and is undoubtedly due to the skill of some of its staff, adding that the UN leadership in New York cannot be said to have been of much support.

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The UN internal auditor has released a report detailing serious deficiencies in the Organisation (see also page 62). The report has certainly not endeared Karl Paschke, the Head of the Office of Internal Oversight, to many people. On the other hand, anybody who is supportive of the UN system should congratulate him for his courageous stand. Self criticism, when not coming from an autocratic regime, is usually a sign for tangible improvement.

- Wolfgang Breyer -