

Kebschull, Dietrich

Article — Digitized Version

The missing link

Intereconomics

Suggested Citation: Kebschull, Dietrich (1970) : The missing link, Intereconomics, ISSN 0020-5346, Verlag Weltarchiv, Hamburg, Vol. 05, Iss. 12, pp. 365-, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02926183>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/138415>

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The Missing Link

Chile has chosen a Marxist politician to be its new President. It is not impossible that such an event will in the foreseeable future be repeated. For, the developing countries' economic situation and their state of the society seems to lead to chaos. Intensified aid from the industrial countries and greater willingness towards international cooperation is now called for more urgently than ever before. The many benevolent statements by leading Western politicians and spokesmen of international organisations might well make the man in the street believe that the goodwill for such a cooperation did indeed exist in all countries of the West. But today's statements awkwardly resemble those of yesterday and the day before. Development policy is not carried by an internationally concerted action but rather, its features are international speeches for intentions of window-dressing, unwillingness and inability to act.

The attitude of the industrial nations towards the plan to link the Special Drawing Rights with development aid was one more example in the more recent past of words and deeds being two entirely different things. As the LDCs still suffer from notorious lack of capital, and external aid lagging far behind their expectations, they came forward with propositions to let them participate automatically in the newly created SDRs. But the plan for a direct or indirect "link" met with universal rejection. The support for such a link given by the UN in their Strategy Document for the second development decade must not, and cannot, lead anyone to be deceived about this fact. This moral support will, after all, at best bring about the appointment of committees which, in their turn, will, as the past has so often taught, delegate the problem to additional sub-committees and thus drag it along. Currency experts may be of the opinion that a rejection of the plan appeared justified. For, a linking of the SDRs with development aid would distort the very object of these new means as a monetary reserve. But it would after all said and done be worthwhile a discussion as to whether the character of the SDRs could not be modified in the light of the aspect of development policy. For the time being it appears as though the monetary arguments solely serve the purpose to protect the industrial countries from certain fixed liabilities which might force them also in the future to continue their performances.

If everything went according to what the highly developed countries on their part aspire, the basis of international cooperation would until doomsday consist of voluntary performances without any binding agreement. For this very reason, commodities agreements so far carry but little weight; for this reason, too, the long-term supplementary financing is being postponed time and again; for this reason all talks about voluntary production curtailments remain fruitless, and for this reason the results of negotiations on preferences were after years of discussion so unsatisfactory.

It would have been quite possible to be more open-minded in respect of many of the LDCs' demands, if only development policy and readiness to aid were more than just empty phrases. And this would be essential in order to avoid a politically as well as socially uncontrolled development. What the industrial countries look upon still today as a considerable concession could tomorrow, in a changed political climate, possibly be regarded as no more than a mean advance performance in order just to avoid tensions among the peoples. Chile is a serious warning that should not be ignored. The Federal Republic in particular, whose relations with the peoples of the Third World are hardly at all overcast by the past, would have excellent chances to opt now for real international cooperation and at long last bring to an end the era during which the LDCs' claims are regularly denied.

Dietrich Kobschull