

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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New ITUC rebukes Switzerland on the Rights to collective bargaining

Brussels, 10 November 2006 (ITUC Online): The newly founded International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has firmly condemned the Swiss government for what it considers to be an unacceptable show of contempt for the fundamental principles of international labour law.

In a letter (http://212.35.100.122/IMG/pdf/SUISSE_Rapport_complementaire_du_Conseil_Federal_relatif_au_cas_2265_Comite.LibSynd.pdf) to the President of the Confederation and the Federal Councillors (government) of Switzerland, ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder censured the Swiss government's attempt to contest the authority of the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association in proceedings ensuing from a complaint lodged by an ITUC affiliate, the Union Syndicale Suisse, concerning the violation of Convention 98 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on the right to organise and collective bargaining.

On 16 June, the Swiss government had, in a 30 page document, contested the legitimacy of the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association, and stated that Convention 98 is not applicable under the constitutional and legal order of Switzerland, despite its having ratified this Convention, which is one of the most important international treaties on labour rights.

“Since the Committee on Freedom of Association came into being, over fifty years ago, and in the 2300 cases it has dealt with since then, never has a single government of a democratic State called this body into question as you have done,” wrote Guy Ryder to the Swiss president, Mr Moritz Leuenberger. The position taken “has very dangerous implications for the credibility of the ILO bodies which have been brought under serious attack,” added Guy Ryder.

For the ITUC, “if maintained, Switzerland’s position could also set a precedent for dictatorships, which will not hesitate to contest the legitimacy of the Committee on Freedom of Association, based on the arguments defended by a democratic State that is supposedly exemplary and respectful of human rights”. It goes on to underline that “this position contrasts starkly with the considerable work undertaken by Switzerland to promote respect for fundamental human rights throughout the world” and “urges the Federal Council to overturn its decision”. The ITUC also expressed its astonishment at such an attitude on the part of the host country of several international institutions, including the International Labour Organisation.

“This is the first intervention by the new ITUC underlines just how important it is that democracies such as Switzerland uphold international law, rather than trying to undermine Fundamental and universal rights” commented Guy Ryder.

Created on November 1, the ITUC represents 168 million workers in 154 countries and territories and has 307 national affiliates.

The new website of the organization is: <http://www.ituc-csi.org>

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