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Hopes focus on New Delhi

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Hopes Focus on New Delhi

Many of the hopes cherished by developing nations are now focussed on the Second Plenary Session of UNCTAD which has just been convened to New Delhi, where the representatives of 132 member countries are expected to deal with a mammoth programme in under two months. Complaints about failures of development planning and the assertion that development aid has missed all its general targets seem to have become the daily bread of those concerned with promoting economic construction in young states. Taken as a whole, developing countries have so far failed to reach the target set for UNO's "Development Decade" of an average annual economic growth rate of five per cent. Until the decade will be over, which means in barely two years' time, the young nations will not succeed in making up for lost speed. However, some comment ought to be added to this apparent failure: to aim at a velocity of growth of five per cent annually on the sum total of gross national products in developing countries during the period 1960—1970 has hardly ever been a realistic expectation. It is highly likely that this range of forward projection was chosen exclusively for the purpose of instilling self-confidence in their own future in the young nations, and of setting a high aim to strive for jointly by both donor and recipient countries. This means that the gap between actual and planned growth rates of GNP ought not to lead anybody to resign himself or to break out in exaggerated laments.

It would, on the contrary, be psychologically risky to herald "UNCTAD II" again as "another of those development aid conferences", in view of the modesty of past results of development aid and of the First World Trade Conference held in Geneva, whose results could hardly be termed successful. "Failure", "foundering", and "incompetence"—such terms must not grow into everyday colloquialisms when discussing development aid, nor should they determine the attitudes of donors and recipients. Debates consisting mainly of offensive reproaches and terms of abuse hurled like a shuttlecock to and fro between developed and less developed nations will not make it easier to solve the problem as to which development methods and which economic system might suit best individual countries still in their pre-industrial stages for taking them off towards their modernisation.

There is a lack of overall planning of development aid, which might prevent the present system, or lack of system, under which individual aid measures or aid programmes cannot hope for effectiveness, as they try to do too many different things with insufficient funds, from achieving much. Another "must" for future effective development aid is a list of priorities, which classifies the tasks according to their importance and urgency. Such an overall review of the entire field of development aid might, one future day, result in the type of "global strategy", which UNCTAD's Secretary General, Dr Prebisch, advocates, but to draw up such a review requires a continuous dialogue between industrial and developing nations. No opportunity to conduct such a dialogue, as it is offered by UNCTAD itself, ought to be neglected. In the final analysis, development policy is a policy for the entire world, not only for its underdeveloped areas, because the interests of the developing nations cannot possibly be separated from those of the world as a whole. UNCTAD's basic concept is not that of irreconcilable opposites clamped together by the brackets of the UNO Charter, as many seem to believe, but it should rather be that of a continuing exchange of opinions about a venture upon which all have to embark jointly, and on which reaching a common understanding is indispensable.

The only practical result of UNCTAD's first plenary conference held at Geneva was a decision to reconvene the conference every three years. The developing and the industrial nations have had ample time to prepare for their new meeting. The Second World Trade Conference now meeting in New Delhi must give proof of UNCTAD having concluded its purely declamatory stage of development. UNCTAD needs palpable successes, in order to provide visible proof that its organisation and plenary session, by their trade and development policy concepts, actually conduct a worldwide economic policy.

Wolfgang Reisener