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Nigeria: Touchstone for Africa

Intereconomics

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Future plenary sessions of UNCTAD are to deal only with questions of principle, which means that they should restrict themselves to indicating objectives and to pointing out along which general avenues such overall targets ought to be approached, leaving to the Council the task to elaborate practical and acceptable solutions, and to prepare ways and means of tackling them. It will of course always remain an open question whether progress in the field of procedure may not again be vitiated by the lack of coordination between the work of the UNCTAD Conference, the Council of UNCTAD, and the numerous committees of the Organisation. Parkinsonian growth of the UNCTAD machinery, leading to the proliferation of committees and special commissions, is on the best way to splitting up and making inoperative the modest existing possibilities of cooperation and communication. There is much overlapping of authority between the Council and some committees, which adds to the difficulties encountered by the work of the organisation, by setting up conflicts when decisions have to be reached, and by duplicating work. And last but not least: nobody has yet found out on whom, and to what extent, decisions made by the Council are to be binding. The human race will be compelled to go on waiting and doubting whether wishful thinking about establishing harmonious equilibrium between differing interests, through international cooperation, may one future day bring UNCTAD resolutions to practical fruition. ogm.

Peru

Another Military Junta

The Peruvian President, Sr Fernando Belaúnde Terry, has been overthrown by a military junta headed by General Velasco, one year before his term of office should have ended in the constitutional way.

Together with Sr Eduardo Frei, the Chilean President, Sr Belaúnde Terry had had the reputation of being Latin America's most progressive president in favour of reforms. Both Frei and Belaúnde were aware of the fact that only speedy economic and social reform could serve as an effective defence mechanism against the dangers of communist revolution. Whilst he was in office, Sr Belaúnde Terry was especially interested in developing Peru's infrastructure and in opening up the country's interior. In order to promote industry, strict import controls and measures of export promotion had been enacted. Far-reaching measures of agricultural reform were embarked on, in order to eliminate the social evils of an antiquated class structure in land-holding. But, in spite of a reform of the tax system and of tax increases, the expensive programme of reforms induced an accelerating devaluation of the Peruvian currency. Thus, it was hardly to be wondered at that unbridled inflation led to loud protests against the reforms among the well-to-do, conservative parts of the population. This conflict between the Conservatives and the government had been smouldering for some time, until it

exploded and thus came into the open through the military coup.

Both the officer corps and the Roman Catholic Church, who are decisive citadels of power and at the same time defenders of the conservative interest in Latin America, will have to learn that the dissatisfaction of the toiling masses will not simply vanish under pressure of dictatorships or prohibitions. Only comprehensive programmes of reform, based on rational economic policies, having the support of all parts of the population, can offer safety against South America looking for a way out of the slough of underdevelopment along the path of communist subversion. crm.

Nigeria

Touchstone for Africa

Over five years after Nigeria's independence had been solemnly proclaimed, four of the most influential Nigerian politicians, among them the Federal Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafewa, were killed by the rebel bullets of army officers of a younger generation. This apparently brought Africa's model democracy, which had been so highly praised in the West, to the brink of disaster within a brief period. On the other hand, the two military revolts of 1966 also put into reverse, perhaps only temporarily, a centrifugal trend by which the crystallisation of a Nigerian nation might have been prevented, whilst regionalisation would have remained paramount and political parties would have returned to their origin as tribal lobbies.

In view of the fierceness of the Nigerian civil war, Europe was soon in the grip of a wave of sympathy for the starving Biafran population. This, however, also brings about an obvious risk for anybody favouring the reunification of Nigeria, for he will swiftly be suspected of being in favour of genocide and man-made famine. People who react like this, however, blind themselves to the incontrovertible fact that Nigeria, whose territory is about four times as large as the Federal Republic of Germany and whose population of about 24 million people consists of about 250 distinct tribes speaking more than 200 different languages, would be fated to complete collapse in the case of a successful Ibo uprising. All over tropical Africa, conditions are similar, and re-tribalisation, as has been attempted in Nigeria, would eventually "Balkanize" the whole of the continent within a comparatively brief period.

All this means that Nigeria has become the touchstone of African development. As Nigeria is blessed with rich crude oil reserves and many other natural resources, this state, after overcoming civil war, might become the strongest political unit of tropical Africa, provided, of course, that it will be possible to reintegrate its Ibo population successfully. At present, it looks as if this need will be met, but only the years to come will show, whether genocide has laid waste Biafra or whether reason was on the side of the stronger battalions. hg.