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## Within a Fortnight of Santiago

**A**lthough the Third United Nations Conference on Trade and Development is scheduled to start on April 13, there is already today a general feeling of pessimism regarding the outcome of this mammoth meeting. Again there will be long speeches by nearly every head of delegation in the course of which the speakers from the developing countries will put forward their complaints and demands on international trade and development, while the representatives of the industrialised countries will try to explain why they have been and continue to be against resolutions which are not in accordance with their own interests. This was the pattern followed during the previous two conferences, which prompted Gunnar Myrdal to remark that UNCTAD has in the past been a complete failure. And there is no indication that Santiago will bring any different results than Geneva and New Delhi.

What are the reasons for this general feeling of frustration? There have been enough recommendations within and outside of UNCTAD to solve international trade and development problems. Yet the difficulty is that the industrialised countries react cautiously and in most cases negatively to any new suggestions. Their attitude towards the "link" between SDRs and development aid illustrates this clearly. Although the idea was put forward some years ago and most experts agree that it is feasible, the rich countries still reject the "link".

Another bold suggestion was the demand for annulment of interstate indebtedness as a debt relief measure for a number of developing countries. In answer to this demand the developed nations have stated that the cancellation of debts would weaken the political will in their own countries to give aid in the future as it would justify the critics who believe development aid to be a barrel without bottom. The rich countries fail to see the positive economic take-off effect such a decision would have in most of these developing countries. It would put them in a position to use export earnings and external financing for the implementation of their own development, and not for the repayment of debts.

As to the question of commodity agreements, it has been recommended to organise the negotiation of agreements on various primary products at the same time and place. Past experience with the commodity-by-commodity approach has shown that it is too difficult to find a common denominator between a number of countries with different interests during these negotiations. The argument is that if commodity agreements are negotiated on a multilateral basis, it will be easier for some nations to give way in some points if they see that they are gaining something in others. In response to this suggestion the industrial nations stated that they are in principle against commodity agreements because these are not as effective as had been

expected. Maybe not, but they have been able to stabilise to a large extent prices — and that was their primary aim. One has only to follow price developments of other raw materials which were not subject to commodity agreements during the last years in order to understand the interest of the developing countries for some form of a world agricultural adjustment policy.

There are many more examples to the point. The industrialised countries justify their reserved attitude towards progressive development ideas by arguing that they cannot take a more positive stand because of public opposition to these suggestions. But is not this negative public response the result of the often uninspiring and uninteresting official information policy in many developed countries? A good example for an effective promotion campaign for development action was given by the Netherlands: in January 1971 its National Committee for Development Strategy 1970–1980 organised with great success a Symposium on the main points to be dealt with at the forthcoming UNCTAD-meeting. In its final report the participants—among them Dr Prebisch and Professor Tinbergen—urged that similar symposia should be held in other developed countries in order to mobilise a more favourable public opinion on development problems. It is to be hoped that this appeal will meet a lively response in the future!

*Carsten R. Moser*