

### THE VIEW FROM SOUTH

## NOT BY COMPOSSION BUT LOGIC OF THE MARKETPLACE

There have also been other extreme views on the failure of UNCTAD V1. One such view comes from reputed Sri Lankan journalist Denzil Peiris, now editor of the monthly journal "South" in his column "People, Places, and Politics" where he lays the blame squarely on UNCTAD Secretary General Gamini Corea whom he dubs an "Eternal Optimist". Peiris gets it across harshly in a commentary on a post conference statement by the Secretary General in these words: "Most observers of UNCTAD V1 saw it as a debacle. They heard the crash of the rickety timber of the last assembly where North-South economic collaboration was talked about. But Corea, a hi-fi buff with instruments sensitive to the lowest decibel, has missed the noises of the breakdown. He insists that the UNCTAD V1 talk-fest in Belgrade had much merit to it.

The incorrigible optimist Corea contends that time will tell a tale of achievement even if instant impressions are unfavourable.

Looking down the corridors of time Corea says that, at the UNCTAD Conference in New Delhi, there was "no firm commitment to a generalised system of preferences, but following which a generalised system of preferences was negotiated". However, if one quantifies the gains and the concessions given to industries where the Third World performs best, compromise from the North was marginal.

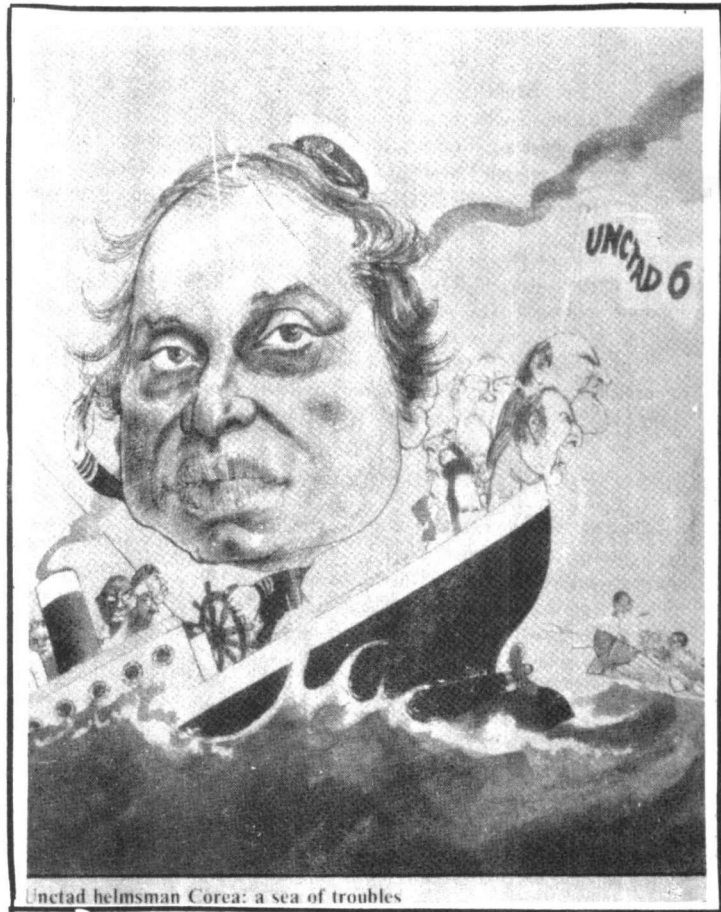
Corea then cites the Nairobi conference in which "reference to the Common Fund was very hesitant, but active negotiations subsequently developed, ending in an agreement." How many Third World expectations were gratified in that agreement? Corea goes on in the same up-beat style for other UNCTADs. The implication seems to be that nothing succeeds like failure at an UNCTAD meeting.

Corea claims that UNCTAD V1 was "relatively well prepared compared to some of its predecessors. It was the occasion for the preparation of analytical documents which were not only produced in time, but which were well received and favourably commented upon". Several delegates to UNCTAD V1 from the North remark that they never read these documents.

In a rare moment of disquiet Corea confesses: "I tend to agree with those who have stated already that an opportunity has been missed."

The irrepresibly hopeful Corea remarks of UNCTAD V1: "There is one thought about the conference which I believe is important, irrespective of the results achieved. This relates to the character of the conference itself. I believe that UNCTAD V1, on my reckoning, was a singularly important event, because it was the first occasion on which government groups of all groups of countries — developed, developing and socialist — were able to come together and address a series of interrelated issues which were of crucial importance in the current international context."

That sounds familiar — echoes of what has been said of all international get-togethers in which, like a babbling brook the talk goes on and on over "crucial current international economic issues."



Unctad helmsman Corea: a sea of troubles

It seems, Corea is the man for whom the hope conveyed in the Christmas carol has been realised: "God rest ye merry gentlemen, May nothing you dismay." International bureaucrats apparently do not realise that economic relations between North and South are not settled by compassion or appeals to global interdependence but by the unfeeling logic of the marketplace.

D.P.