

FOREIGN NEWS REVIEW

MORE MEAGRE RESULTS FROM UNCTAD CONFABS

UNCTAD's Trade and Development Board held its 27th session in October, in Geneva, the first since UNCTAD V1 in Belgrade. This too ended with results falling short of the aspirations of many of its members. The Venezuelan delegate speaking at the end of this session, on behalf of the Group of 77, expressed "deep disappointment" at the results of the session, and emphasised "important issues had been remitted to later sessions of the Board in what seemed to have become a habitual reflex".

Enrique Ter Horst of Venezuela expressed concern about the fact that not only in UNCTAD, but in other fora as well it was impossible to reach an agreement on measures that would enable developing countries to cope with the most immediate effects of the prevailing serious economic situation, much less tackle the underlying causes of it. During the session, he stated, one industrialized country after another had recognized that no single country or group of countries alone could resolve the difficult problems now facing the international community. "Yet some countries", he charged, "not only disdain international co-operation but continue to try to resolve their own problems at the expense of others and above all at the expense of those who don't have the means to defend themselves. It is this attitude that is at the root of the failure of this session of the Board and of the meagre results of UNCTAD V1 and other important meetings".

China's delegate to the meeting too voiced disappointment at the Board's inability to follow through on the resolutions adopted at Belgrade and to organize effective consultations on issues that the Conference had not been able to tackle. No progress had been achieved on these questions. The North-South dialogue in his view was losing ground and if this trend continued, he warned, it would be necessary to think seriously, about the future.

Sri Lanka's delegate saw UNCTAD V1's failure, in spite of "painstakingly contrived resolutions in the three main areas of the Conference" as "inability to put the various elements together in a strong, related whole".

This session, in early October provided an opportunity for member countries to evaluate the results of the Belgrade UNCTAD V1 Conference and to assess the outlook for international economic co-operation.

Abdillahi Sai Osman, (Somalia), who was elected as the new Chairman of the Board, stated that the UNCTAD Conference had failed in large measure to address itself adequately to the main issues before it and to offer the appropriate and effective solution which the world community had expected from it. "It must be admitted he continued, "that we missed a historical opportunity to contribute meaningfully to world development and recovery".

UNCTAD was born in 1960's as a challenge — economic, social and intellectual — to the industrialized countries. With an initial cry of "trade not aid" it attempted to change the terms of exchange between the industrialized and under-developed countries. Its broad thrust initially agreed with the interests of both the ruling classes of the Third World (who would have got a share of any favourable change in the terms of trade) as well as of those who wanted a more radical transformation (imperialism was in the last analysis an economic phenomenon). Intellectually its ideas were born as a reaction to the hegemony of Euro American theory, Prebisch the first Secretary General of UNCTAD going on record that most Third World intellectual output was a "pale imitation" of Euro American thought. The Dependencia school that arose covered such fields as the economy, society and culture.

Among the nearly 40 statements made in the general debate, those of the developing countries consistently expressed scepticism about the durability of the incipient recovery in developed market economy countries and contested the thesis that it would bring substantial benefits to developing countries in the near future. They argued that reliance could not be placed on a "trickle down" process alone and that deliberate and concerted measures should be taken to reactivate the economies of developing countries. While recognising the severity of the world eco-

omic crisis, spokesmen of developed countries were in general more optimistic about the outlook for recovery in their countries and the contribution this could make to the reactivation of development in the Third World.

Representatives of the 108 countries attending the Board's Sessions also expressed themselves on how they saw the significance of UNCTAD V1. On the whole there was general agreement that the Conference had failed to produce a coherent programme in response to the crisis facing the world economy. Developing countries considered that there was even more need now for the types of measures, including substantial injections of capital, that had been put forward at Belgrade aimed at reactivating development.

The first decade of UNCTAD from 1964 was a period of deep analysis and fervour but without a historical opportunity for global change. The historical opportunity however arose only in the second decade of UNCTAD, specially in the years 1973-1975, with the oil price hikes (the first success at global countervailing power) and a series of sensitising global conferences on food, population, the environment and the UN call for a New International Economic Order. The great failure of UNCTAD was its inability to use these historical windows which are unlikely to become available again. Unpardonable was the inability to tie the successful oil price hike to a pan-Third World counter on the bargaining table.

The last UNCTAD conference has been written off as a dismal failure but the roots of failure go back a few years further. There is dependency and cynicism all round as indicated in the discussion on this page of recent UNCTAD events.

S.G.

Optimism

Still there were views that consensus resolutions had been adopted in the important areas of commodities, trade and money and finance and that these could form the basis for effective work by UNCTAD in the future.

Alfonso de la Serna of Spain, on behalf of Group B as a whole, said that its evaluation of UNCTAD V1 was "not as pessimistic as some have heard". While agreeing that the outcome undoubtedly

fell short of aspirations, the Group felt that "modest but valuable and practical progress was made on a large number of fronts as evidenced by the adoption of consensus resolutions on virtually every item of the agenda". A major objective of unctad was to provide the North and the South with a forum for wide-ranging dialogue which would contribute to improvement of the international environment and to seek follow-up action both within

UNCTAD and in other appropriate international bodies. Group B viewed UNCTAD as a building block in that dialogue.

Again, Athanassios Petropoulos of Greece, on behalf of the European Economic Community, said the Community held "a broadly positive view of the results of UNCTAD V1 although it was also conscious of shortcomings in a number of aspects."