Making Sure of Survival
Reflections on the Report

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Early in 1980 — well before the Special Session of the UN General Assembly in New York — the Independent Commission for International Development Issues chaired by Willy Brandt presented its Report: “North-South: A Programme for Survival”. The findings of the Commission which is better known as “North-South Commission” or “Brandt Commission” have met with agreement and approval but also with criticism. Which recommendations has the Commission made? Which points of the Report are being criticised?

The Brandt Commission’s analysis of the North-South situation confirms the established fact that the development in the southern part of the world is lagging behind the set objectives. High growth rates are recorded only in threshold countries with ample raw material resources and in newly industrialized countries, and the social progress is as slow in these as in the poorer countries. Such progress is however an integral part of development. The Commission has therefore examined how various basic needs like health care, housing and education are being satisfied and how the people share in social, political and economic decisions. It found the performance level in these areas to be inadequate in the poor countries as well as in many industrialized states. Reasons for this are high armament expenditures, the existing international economic order, the protectionism of the industrialized countries, and an inadequate resource transfer. Of especial moment is in the Commission’s view the high armament expenditure in the industrialized and developing countries which amounts to wastage of productive capital, technical knowledge and skilled labour. The Report includes comparisons designed to show how sensible deployment of these resources could resolve some of the developing countries’ problems:

1 The military expenditure of only half a day would suffice to finance the whole malaria eradication programme of the World Health Organization, and less would be needed to conquer riverblindness, which is still the scourge of nations.

2 A modern tank costs one million dollars; that amount could improve storage facilities for 100,000 tons of rice and thus save 4000 tons or more annually: one person can live on just over a pound of rice a day. The same sum of money could provide 1000 classrooms for 30,000 children.

3 For the price of one jet fighter (20 million dollars) one could set up about 40,000 village pharmacies.

4 One-half of one per cent of one year’s world military expenditure would pay for all the farm equipment needed to increase food production and approach self-sufficiency in food-deficit low-income countries by 1990.1

Diversion of the armament expenditures to other uses would in the Commission’s view not only release substantial funds for development aid by the industrialized countries and development policy purposes in the poor countries but constitute a better and more effective contribution to the safeguarding of peace. The Commission finds this view on its underlying concept of security.

An Extended Security Concept

The Report regards the transfer of resources to the developing countries as a means of safeguarding the future of the world and an instrument for maintaining the peace of the world because of the existence of close interdependences between the North and the South. The trade relations with the developing countries are, on the one hand, protecting jobs in the industrialized countries which depend, besides, to an

essential degree on continuous supplies at favourable prices of raw materials from developing countries. On the other hand, the North is, in the Commission's view, obliged to practise solidarity with the South because poverty represents the greatest threat to security in the world. Oppression and exploitation could provoke social disturbances in individual states. Impoverished countries seek a way out of an inequitable economic system by resorting to a delivery boycott or taking advantage of monopoly positions and thereby endanger the continuing operation of a stable international economic system which can bestow great benefits on all the participating states. Industrialized and developing countries must for this reason work together for the eradication of poverty with the aim of increased security:

"These different needs for health, housing or education, as well as the most fundamental need for food, all provide a clear and practical challenge both to the countries themselves, and to the industrialized nations without whose help the poorer countries can hardly succeed. But the idea that these problems are quite separate, and can be solved by specific initiatives, can no longer be believed. Whatever may be accomplished by medical aid, housing drives or school grants, the only way to achieve major improvements in these areas is to help the economies of these countries to grow and industrialize so that they will increasingly be in a position to help themselves; and this can only be brought about through a change in the international economic environment; through more purposeful collaboration between North and South, and much more systematic assistance from the North."2

The Report refutes the notion that the poor countries should renounce all aid for a while in order to promote self-reliant development in accordance with their own aspirations during this time. Not only the demands of the developing countries for a drastic increase of development aid but the necessarily common concern of all states for the conservation of the resources for future prosperity militate against this notion in the view of the Commission: "Concern for the future of the planet is inextricably connected with concern about poverty."3 It must be the aim of the efforts for long-term security for all countries to create a world "based less on power and status, more on justice and contract; less discretionary, more governed by fair and open rules".4

The Eastern bloc states must join in these efforts, and so must the rich developing countries; a deepening gulf between poor and rich countries puts their prosperity as much at risk as that in the Western industrialized countries.

Recommendations of the "Brandt-Commission"

The solidarity should in the view of the Commission find expression in a comprehensive list of measures to be enacted by the governments of the industrialized and developing countries in the short and long term. They include joint programmes to combat the population explosion and to research into its hitherto unexplained social and biomedical background. As a priority task the industrialized countries are to initiate with the developing countries an action for the stabilization of commodity prices at remunerative levels5 and remove trade barriers against imports of semi-finished and finished goods from the poor countries. A fund for raw materials is considered an expedient means for setting up price-stabilizing buffer stocks and creating a "second window" to finance projects like storage, processing, sales promotion, productivity improvements and diversification of economic activities. Other demands include compensatory funds for export earnings shortfalls and support for the opening-up of raw material deposits. The prices of energy must reflect the growing scarcity in the long term of non-renewable raw materials. The energy supplies for the poorer countries in particular are to be improved by international accords. New undepletable sources of energy must be opened up by joint programmes. An energy research centre under United Nations auspices is to collate and evaluate energy research information and programmes and draw up forecasts of consumption and requirements. The Commission acknowledged the necessity and desirability of industrialization in the developing countries. The rich countries must make their contribution by removing protectionist obstacles to trade and engaging in technical and financial cooperation. Furthermore, world-wide efforts are to be made to increase the production of foodstuffs by providing technical and financial assistance to agriculture. New impulses are to be given to agriculture in the developing countries by institutional, social and organizational reforms. Industrialized and developing countries are to enter into joint commitments for the promotion and direction of foreign investments and technology transfer, etc., through coordinated legislation.

2 Ibid., p. 58/59.
3 Ibid., p. 75.
4 Ibid., p. 65.
5 Ibid., p. 158.