

# Editorial

ALTHOUGH THE proposals of the Brandt Commission for global economic management in a climate of increased *détente* seem to have been foreclosed by recent events, the conclusions on North–South relations appear to take on an even greater importance. The significance of the Report<sup>1</sup> is that it presents relations between the industrialized and developing countries within a general political framework, and proposes measures which are regarded as necessary and beneficial to all nations concerned. Although it speaks of a “massive” transfer of resources from developed countries, these are in fact within the framework of the already agreed amount of 0·7 per cent of the gross national product, which, as our article on Netherlands Development Policies in this issue shows, can be achieved by any country wishing to do so.

The Report contains little that is very new, except for the proposal for a new international organization, the World Development Fund, and some gap-filling suggestions in the monetary sphere. Its outstanding features are that it is authoritative; it is independent; and it is unanimous. It thus fulfils all the conditions laid down by Jean Monnet for a proposal by the European Commission. It presents in fact the programme that the governments in the Paris North–South Conference in 1977 could have agreed upon, but abysmally failed to do.

The further step, and the most difficult, in the Monnet technique is to induce governments to act, and for this purpose the subtly-balanced structure of the European Community was devised. The Brandt Report calls for a summit of twenty-five world leaders, but it also calls for a strengthening of the United Nations system, although it goes into little detail in this respect.

One of the elements which suggests itself here could be the increased association of unofficial bodies with the work of governments. In this context the proposals of the Brandt Commission, put forward in outline only, might well be followed by further commissions dealing with each chapter which requires elaboration. The most urgent is that concerning institutions. It is also to be hoped that the European Parliament, with its increasing appetite, may also direct some of its attention to United Nations affairs.

The UN agencies too might avail themselves more of independent groups to examine proposals in order to ensure that such proposals are practicable and negotiable, and perhaps to arrange for informal “pre-negotiation” where all interests are represented. In such ways

<sup>1</sup> *North–South: A Programme for Survival*. Pan Books (London, 1980), pp. 304, price £1.95.

wasteful conferences with no reasonable chance of success might be avoided.

Attention will probably also have to be given to the system of voting by members of the United Nations. It may well be that for certain purposes it is important that each state should have one vote, but as a practical expedient some way should be found to make the votes cast as a general rule reflect the actual strength of the voters. This issue has arisen in a real way at the WIPO Conference (reported here) and has caused much difficulty.

In the field of commodities weighted majorities have long been accepted. The same is true of the World Bank and the regional banks. It is also the case that the International Monetary Fund operates by way of weighted majority based on the size of the members' contributions. This the Brandt Commission finds to be unfair to the developing countries (without substantial contribution) and considers that "rules must ensure that the Fund is not wholly administered on the basis of shareholding". This might be part of a package for the re-allocation of voting strengths.

Another respect in which the present voting system seems defective is that the United Nations process does not take into account the federal nature of the world. It is as ridiculous for the 77 at the recent UNIDO conference (also reported in this issue) to vote down all the western and industrialized countries, and as they tried to do at WIPO, as it would be to vote down the African, Latin-American or Asian countries in a body. If, however, a procedure could be devised that would in a more realistic way reflect the actual strengths of the individual members, and which would at the same time contain some built-in safeguards for major groupings, it might be possible to move by vote in some circumstances from mere recommendations to measures having some form of binding effect. This would have a strengthening influence on the system as a whole. If there is to be a World Development Fund this might be the opportunity to insist, as a material part of the negotiations, that the decision-making process should be substantially improved.

It is to be hoped that the Brandt Report will enable governments to realize that, after the paramount issue of world peace, the most pressing task is for the improvement of North-South relations, and that the whole diplomatic thrust of all countries should be in this direction. The Report will also help to mobilize public opinion behind governments in the full comprehension that this is no longer just a moral issue but one of urgent political necessity.