



Is it time for another Grand Assize on foreign aid? Some reflections on the Pearson and Brandt Commissions

Dr Patrick Kilby

Assize

- An ancient species of court, consisting of a certain number of men, usually twelve, who were summoned together to try a disputed cause, performing the functions of a jury, except that they gave a verdict from their own investigation and knowledge and not upon evidence adduced. They were called the "assise" from the fact that they sat together.
- the judges of assise were sent by special commission from the crown on circuits through the kingdom, proceed to take indictments, and to try disputed causes.

Pearson Commission

- Idea from George Woods in March 1968 that Robert McNamara took up enthusiastically later that year.:
 - 'The situation with respect to the waning interest in development finance is serious and it calls for new and unusual measures.'
 - wanted the Nobel Peace prize committee to ask for such an assize 'as a contribution to peace'.
- Eight Commissioners led by Ex Canadian PM and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Lester Pearson: Sir Edward Boyle (U.K.), Roberto de Oliveira Campos,(Brazil), C. Douglas Dillon (U.S.), Wilfried Guth (Fed. Rep. of Germany), Sir Arthur Lewis (Jamaica), Robert E. Marjolin (France), and Saburo Okita (Japan).
- World Bank paid for it.

- to look at aid since the War.
 - 1950s aid was very much a Cold War artefact (Soviet v the West);
 - Bandung Conference (1955) first voice of the third world;
 - Non aligned movement, UNCTAD.
 - Failure of the first development decade. Aid flows stagnated.

Pearson Commission not a success

- Seen as asking for more of the same
- Pearson commission was about generating political will through public opinion in rich countries,
- comparatively small representatives of the Third World on it.
- Analysis was towards a simplified model without differentiation.
- Optimistic presumptions.
- Largely ignored as oil crisis and financial crisis combined.
- Third World demanded a NIEO.

Brandt Commission

- Idea emerged in early 1976 from a lunch with Maqbul ul Haq and Barbara (Baroness) Jackson who then wrote to William Clarke too raise it with 'Bob'
- a new grand assize. Dutch would pay for it via a trust account.
- avoided a preponderance of development aid regulars and do-gooders; should be a blend of ages from elder statesmen to 'young turks' is recommended.
- majority of commissioners from developing countries and women;
- Third World thought the commission was a Western attempt to wriggle out of Conference on International Economic Cooperation (CIEC) or to outflank their NIEO strategy at the UN.

Pearson

- Nine men, no women, two from third world, (Jamaica and Brazil).
- Six meetings in six countries held over six months (1969);
- called on ‘enlightened self-interest’ because moral obligations don’t go far enough;
- more and better aid; more private investment; action on the Third World’s mounting debts.

Brandt

- Brandt had 17 commissioners — including one woman, one trade union leader, and ten from the Third World
- Eight meetings in seven countries over 18 months (1978-79).
- appeals to ‘a commitment to international social justice’. Mutual interests alone won’t help the poorest countries and the poorest people.
- a wider net: ecology, energy, food, health, jobs, housing, migration and land reform et al; but zeroed in on debt, aid and trade.

Critiques

- Pearson too Western dominated and to little traction in the US, overtaken by the oil crisis and NIEO debates;
- Brandt stronger analysis but similar solutions. Very popular in Europe but limited impact in the US. The Reagan administration ignored it. Reaganomics and structural adjustment led to the lost decade.

Is it time for a new assize

- Thirty years since Brandt; and the world has seen:
 - The lost decade of the 1980s and the ideological focus so the Washington consensus and structural adjustment, and its rejection;
 - The Asian Economic Crisis and the challenge to the credibility of the World Bank and IMF formula;
 - The rise of alternative sources of development finance: the BRICS; China; AIIB et al;
 - the rise of more nationalistic ideologies and the move away from globalisation and a global order.
- Who would be on such a commission and who would lead it?



Thank You