
The Churches and the Charities on the Brandt Report

Roy Laishley

The Brandt plan is a remarkable world charter—an urgent but realistic package of emergency measures which involve both North and South in a bid for their mutual protection.

Editorial. *Christian Aid News*.
April/June 1980

Asking someone what they think of Brandt today is too much like asking someone what they think of God, when the reply is: 'I am for him'. The Commission did not produce a gospel, nor even a radical plan, but rather a well-presented series of urgent development options.

Ibid. October/December 1980

The Report is a prestigious document . . . This does not make it the gospel truth. We must read it with an open and critical mind, and ask: does it supply any real answers? Is, as Edward Heath believes, increasing world population the most serious problem? Can the pursuit of private profit necessarily lead to public gain? Do multinationals do more harm than good? In other words, whose survival would Brandt's proposals ensure?

Third World First, *Campaigns Bulletin*.
July/August 1980

Don't be conned by Brandt.

Brian Wren. *Third World First*.
September 1980

*Brandt builds a temporary and false consensus for limited change which will not go far enough . . . it does not demystify economic analysis for all those who hope that the 'mixed economy' will find a new equilibrium through **real** trade liberalisation. **effective** regional integration, the free play of market forces and a new round of neo-Keynesian pump-priming and demand management. In short, Brandt does not disillusion those who believe that the system can 'be restored' although it opens doors for those who foresee a more radical transformation of the international economic system and of national economies.*

Terry Lacey, General Secretary,
War on Want, December 1980

The Brandt recommendations, if implemented, will be good for the Third World. . . Yet the premise of

the mutual interest argument—more exports to the North, means more resources to buy goods from the North—may be queried by the most progressive forces in the Third World. They will question whether a closer integration into world markets is what is best for developing countries whose cultural heritage is already being wiped out by Western fashions and values.

Editorial, *Spur*. World Development Movement,
March 1980

We are not following Brandt blindly but it is the best thing that has been around for ten years.

Worker from World Development Movement

The Brandt Report has created more publicity for Third World issues than ever before.

Worker from Scottish Education and
Action for Development

In November 1980 the Reading group of the World Development Movement (WDM)—a grass-roots development action and lobbying organisation—invited Judith Hart to talk to them on the Brandt Report. In some trepidation, they hired a larger hall than usual for the occasion. In the event, 500 people turned up to listen, and two sittings were required to ensure that everybody heard Judith Hart's speech.

This example was repeated up and down the country. Just how many meetings on the Brandt Report have been held is not known, but it is clear that an impressive number of gatherings has been held in the year since its publication in February 1980. Edward Heath's private office calculates that Britain's Commissioner spoke at over 100 meetings between February 1980, when the Report was officially published, and February 1981. Since becoming Director of Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), former Labour Minister Frank Judd has spoken at over 50 meetings. Since August, Evan Luard, OXFAM's special envoy on the Brandt Report, has spoken at over 25. Judith Hart too has spoken at a large number of meetings. WDM estimates that its members have held over 80 meetings; and Christian Aid's 45 area staff are fully occupied with giving presentations on the subject. Peter Haynes of the Church of England's Board for Social Responsibility says the response to Brandt among Anglicans has been 'quite remarkable', with over a third of the

Church's 43 dioceses having held meetings on the Report during 1980. Non-conformist Churches report a similar degree of interest.

Of course there is some duplication between these meetings. but it is clear that they have tapped a level of public interest and attendance unprecedented in the recent British political scene. outside of election years.

Interest in the spoken word on Brandt is mirrored by interest in the written. Over 100,000 copies of the paperback version of the Report have been sold in the UK alone, more than double the sales figure for any other country (the next largest, as reported in December 1980, was 39,000 in the United States). The Centre for World Development Education (CWDE) produced a summary of the Report in their newspaper 'Action for Development': by February 1981, 11,000 copies had been distributed, while 30,000 copies of a second, longer pamphlet, 'North-South: our links with the poorer countries of the world' had been sold by March. OXFAM, Third World First and the Board for Social Responsibility have all produced summaries and (in some cases) critiques of the Report and all have found a ready audience for their material. In addition, the newspapers of the various non-government organisations (NGOs)¹ have also summarised the Report and have been snapped up enthusiastically by their readership.

Some concern with the Brandt Report among the 'development lobby' was of course to be expected. But the scale and scope of interest among different constituencies of the general public has taken even the professional activists by surprise. Many full-time workers in the NGO development field had greeted the publication of the Report with a great deal of scepticism, viewing it as little more than an up-dated version of the Pearson Report and likely to prove just as abortive. Few, if any, planned to give it priority attention in terms of funds and staff time.

This has led to a curious lag in the NGO response to the Brandt Report, attributable also to the poorly organised launching of the Report—two press conferences, one in December, the next in February, followed by the book coming out in March—and the time needed to digest the Report's contents.

The Church of England General Synod, meeting in February 1980, took note of the Brandt Report in their proceedings. One of the earliest meetings on the Report was a seminar in March organised by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Roman Catholic

¹ The shorthand term we will use throughout this paper for the churches and charities.

Church. CWDE and OXFAM brought out synopses of the Report, and most NGO newspapers covered its contents and recommendations soon after its publication.

But, curiously, in contrast to the extensive coverage in some of the main quality national papers (*the most important event of the year*, said the *Sunday Times*), initial NGO reaction to the Report, as expressed in their newspapers, was cautious and muted. Third World First contented itself with a brief summary in its March/April issue of *Campaigns Bulletin*, waiting until the July/August edition to produce both a long summary and an outline of planned activities for the rest of the year.

Spur, WDM's newspaper, reported the Commission's main recommendations in its February 1980 edition, following it with an editorial in March which observed that

organisations like WDM must promote discussions . . . and influence decision makers about the need for international solidarity and for global solutions:

but failed to announce any campaign of action. An editorial in the April/June issue of *Christian Aid News*, stressing that the Report's ideas were not new, contented itself with a bland statement that

they should be heard by people in a position of influence.

(By its October/December issue, the mood had changed; under an editorial headed 'Messages we cannot afford to ignore', the newspaper roundly condemned the British Government's rejection of key Brandt recommendations.)

In fact, the pace of NGO action on Brandt picked up rapidly from May 1980 onwards. In that month, five NGOs met with Douglas Hurd, Minister at the Foreign Office, to protest at the Government's attitude to the Brandt Report, and the Annual Assembly of the United Reform Church urged its members to lobby their MPs to bring the Brandt Report to the attention of the Government.

In July, the Methodists, at their Annual Conference, called on the Government to act on the recommendations of the Brandt Commission. In June, WDM began a campaign to get the British Government to commit a 'substantial' part of the funds saved through the reduction of the UK's contribution to the EEC budget to the Emergency Programme proposed by the Brandt Commission. A briefing paper was produced for the House of Commons debate on the Brandt Report on 16 June which argued that

the Brandt Report is probably more relevant to Britain than to any other major industrialised country

because the UK exports a higher proportion of its gross national product than any other country, and has a large number of jobs dependent upon Third World trade. And in August, OXFAM appointed former Labour Minister, Evan Luard, to work specifically on the follow-up to the Brandt Report. As well as speaking at meetings, he has been responsible for producing leaflets and fact-sheets on issues related to the Brandt Report, and for liaising with the House of Commons, in particular with the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, and its sub-committee on Overseas Development.

In explaining the build-up in activity following the Brandt Report, a number of factors can be identified. First, NGO workers point to the influence of a number of tireless individuals. Edward Heath, as a former Prime Minister, has been of central importance in giving the Report a high profile and legitimacy with groups not normally active in the development lobby. A network of smaller meetings, tending to reproduce yet more meetings, have resulted from his efforts. The activities of Judith Hart and Frank Judd too help to explain both the range and diversity of public response.

The second explanatory factor was the reaction prompted by the attitudes and policies of the British Government. First came swingeing aid cuts, combined with an implicit shift away from priority for the poorest in aid policy, which could be expected to provoke a swift critical response from the community of development NGOs. These were followed by an outright rejection of the Brandt Report's major conclusions in a Foreign Office Memorandum in July.² That Memorandum's unequivocal language on the 'merits of the present world economic system, with its wide reliance on open markets for trade and financial flows' offered a startling contrast, not only to the essentially Keynesian recommendations of the Brandt Report, but also to its moral tone. While many NGOs questioned the Report's economic assumptions and recommendations, its basic conclusion, that the world faced a moral imperative to construct a more equitable and just economic system, appealed to a wide range of ideological opinions. The Report's moral tone, according to many church-based NGO staff, was a crucial factor in the response it has evoked in their constituency. Christian Aid emphasised 'the strong moral basis' of the Report in its first editorial; in the view of the Board for Social Responsibility, the Brandt Report

endorses the main themes in Christian development education over the last 15 years.

² See this *Bulletin*.

The emphasis on removing poverty and hunger because they are evils, rather than merely because they are economically inefficient, the call for social justice across and within countries, and above all the linking of economic well-being in both the North and South with global peace and security reiterate the main pre-occupations of development NGOs. Brandt's linking of the disarmament issue with economic transfers to the South and global security is a theme taken up in much of the NGO literature and debate on the Report.

Much of the response to the Brandt Report, therefore, lies in an identification with its moral tone: an identification aided by the contrasting 'survival of the fittest' ethos apparently characterising the present UK Government's policy on North-South issues. A similar process can be found in response to the economic recommendations of the Report.

Brandt's reworking of the theme of interdependence, with its stress on the North's self-interest in the prosperity of the South, failed to excite all development NGOs. There was a widely-felt conviction that an intensification of international trading ties would be to the further detriment of the poorest groups in the South, especially given the Report's almost total pre-occupation with government-to-government links, which was held not only by relatively radical groups such as War on Want, but among key personnel in OXFAM and other voluntary agencies. But the polarisation in economic debate that has occurred with Mrs Thatcher's monetarism has put the Brandt Report on the side of the angels as far as practical NGO action is concerned. For all their continuing doubts at many of its recommendations, NGO staff recognise that, in the world of the development lobby at least, the Brandt Report has become a rallying cry for people convinced of the need for continued public and government action—be it in fighting poverty in the South, or creating jobs at home.

Many people and agencies have given a wholehearted endorsement to the Brandt Report, and particularly to its Emergency Programme. But even those who approach the Report more cautiously concede the role it can play in furthering the goals and policies of the development lobby in trying to raise public consciousness on development issues. *We are not following Brandt blindly*, one WDM worker said, *but it is the best thing that has been around for ten years.*

Terry Lacey, General-Secretary of War on Want, makes essentially the same point in a round-about way. *Brandt builds a temporary and false consensus for limited change which will not go far enough*, he claims. *But the plea of Brandt is a plea for dramatic change—for peace, justice and jobs.* For all its faults,

Lacey argues, the Brandt Report goes to the core of development education's role of trying to create a climate of opinion in which ordinary citizens can participate in the key question of how world resources are to be allocated to solve the problem of world poverty. The Brandt Report, Lacey argues, is a political document, which requires a political response:

If the development lobby is to use Brandt successfully to mobilise political impetus for change, then it has to build on the economic concepts the Brandt Report has articulated.

Third World First has perhaps gone furthest among NGOs in developing a critique of the Report. *Don't be conned by Brandt*. Brian Wren warns, *it is an attempt at a liberal consensus, very much right of centre*. In a series of day schools up and down the country, Third World First addressed the question of *whose survival Brandt's proposals would ensure*. But Third World First acknowledge that the Report is a *prestigious document*. The results of their day schools suggest that it can provide an important channel through which to promote discussion and create action on the alternative strategies being formulated by Third World First members.

The combination of a strong response to the moral themes of the Brandt Report among the development lobby's normal constituency (fanned by the speaking campaigns of Edward Heath and others), its relevance to the economic uncertainties and debate already under way in the UK and the radically opposite strategy practised by the British Government has placed the Brandt Report at the centre of NGO activities and priorities. The hard-line attitude adopted by the UK at the UN Special Session on development in August and September consolidated this process. Since then NGO action on Brandt has, if anything, been growing stronger, rather than declining.

Autumn 1980 saw a remarkable burst of activity against the British Government's attitude to North-South relations. On 11 November, the heads of OXFAM, Christian Aid and the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development (CAFOD) visited the Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington, to protest at the Government's attitude to the Brandt Report and at the aid cuts. Over a two-week period in the same month, the Church of England and the British Council of Churches three times debated Brandt and the general public were confronted with 'the Brandt Report' on their nightly news bulletin. Again in November, Edward Heath and Judith Hart addressed many meetings with large audiences up and down the country.

The pace of activity has continued to grow in the early months of 1981. In terms of public meetings, Frank

Judd, Evan Luard and Edward Heath all report that requests for them to speak are accelerating rather than falling off. Audiences will also soon have the benefit of visual rather than just literary materials produced by the NGOs. Barbara Wood is producing a 15-minute introductory film on Brandt, and CWDE is making a 20-minute 'discussion starter' on central Brandt issues. The Trade Union International Research and Education Group (TUIREG) is also producing a 20-minute programme, 'Talking about Brandt', for trade union audiences. Meanwhile, OXFAM is producing a new series of leaflets and discussion papers on Brandt, and the Overseas Development Institute has prepared a Briefing Paper to be published in June.

One important feature of the public response to the Brandt Report, a key one in explaining why development NGOs have given the Report such increasing attention, has been its relative success in taking the development and interdependence debate beyond the normal constituency of the church-based, politically-active faithful. For example, the formal education system is also becoming more involved. Local enthusiasm has already produced some 'in-service' training for teachers to discuss the implications and potential of Brandt themes for schools. CAFOD is organising this on a more formal basis, with the first 'in-service' day being held in Liverpool in conjunction with the local development education centre there. In February, Rolle College in Exmouth held a conference for primary and secondary teachers on the implications of Brandt for the curriculum.

Some groups have been concerned to lobby the business community. In June 1980, CWDE held a seminar for businessmen on the mineral development chapter of the Report; Frank Judd has talked to BP executives; and in October Edward Heath addressed an audience of over 1,000 at a conference of the Institute of Production Engineers in Cheltenham. In December, *The Times* was co-organiser of a one-day conference on the Brandt Report which was very well attended by senior businessmen and addressed by a number of prestigious speakers, including the Foreign Secretary.

Edward Heath has been important in bringing the message of the Brandt Report to the Tory Party. Nevertheless a Young Conservative conference on the Report was one of the few ill-attended meetings, and fringe activity at the 1980 Conservative Party Conference was very limited. But both WDM and Scottish Education and Action for Development (SEAD) report an unprecedented amount of lobbying and letter-writing on the subject by Tory voters at the grass-roots. WDM's Director, John Mitchell, for one, is convinced that the scale of dissatisfaction being

expressed by traditional Tory voters in this way was instrumental in lessening the extent of further aid cuts in the autumn.

Formal activity in the Labour Party has been more extensive. There were two well-attended fringe groups meetings at the October Party Conference, one organised by the Fabian Society, the other by the newly-formed Labour Aid and Development Committee. Both WDM and War on Want have been active in promoting discussion on Brandt at both constituency and Parliamentary level. Eleven constituencies opted to nominate a Third World issue as their sole resolution to the Party Conference.

But despite a full debate on development, which committed the Party to implement the 0.7 per cent aid target, progress on development issues, and on the Brandt Report in particular, remains very limited at the constituency level. A similar block can be found in the trade union movement, despite the activities of TUIREG.

Jobs and unemployment are the dominant issues for these groups. The relevance of the Brandt Report in this respect was recognised in, for example, the programme of four conferences organised by the Welsh Centre for International Affairs at the beginning of 1981. But Terry Lacey, of War on Want, for one, argues that, if the development NGOs are to make any headway in the Labour and trade union movement, they must grasp the nettle of protectionism and accept the legitimacy of the role of at least some forms of import controls.

The Liberal Party Conference in September saw the establishment of its own North-South pressure group. It was launched by two Parliamentary candidates who have both been full-time development NGO workers, John Madeley and Jonathan Fryer. The importance attributed to the issue by the Party was shown by David Steele's denunciation of the Government's attitude to the Brandt Report in his keynote address to the Liberal Party Conference.

There is now an enormous range of groups and associations concerned with the issues of the Brandt Report. A special conference was called to examine the means for promoting wider discussion and understanding of the Brandt Report by the Standing Conference on World Development in February 1981. It was attended by more than 35 NGOs and eight others sent their interested apologies.

As for the future, it is hoped that the strength of public concern over Brandt will be shown by the mass lobby

of Parliament on 5 May 1981. WDM, acting as the administrative centre for a committee of development NGOs, has had a quarter of a million lobby registration forms printed and initial responses were highly encouraging. The lobby will go on throughout the day and into the evening. Its aim is to show MPs and the Government just how wide a cross-section of the public is concerned at the lack of positive response to the Brandt Report. With a publicity eye to the North-South Summit in Mexico in October, the NGOs will be urging the Government to take practical steps to alter the basis of its present hard-line image in the Third World.

Third World First expects that its three-day national conference to discuss its critique of the Brandt Report in April will generate a series of activities promoting alternative strategies. On the other hand, WDM will continue to lobby for the implementation of the key Brandt proposals. The theme of 'One World Week' in October will be Brandt's Emergency Programme: Evan Luard of OXFAM believes that the Emergency Programme will be an important focus for continued NGO activities on the Brandt Report. In July, the Church of England General Synod will debate the Report: and on that occasion a general call may be made for the Church and its members to devote one per cent of their income to development.

Media coverage seems likely to increase. BBC Radio, Granada and Yorkshire TV and BBC TV in conjunction with the *New Internationalist* are all planning programmes on the Brandt Report or associated themes.

Conclusion

According to SEAD, the Brandt Report has given *more publicity to Third World issues than ever before*. WDM's Director, John Mitchell, agrees that *we haven't seen this sort of interest in development, ever*. More pertinently, in the light of official affirmation of the lack of public interest in development, one NGO staff member comments that Brandt has come as a shot in the arm for the development lobby.

Having made few or no forward plans for action, the NGOs responded speedily to the growing interest in the Report among their normal constituency and beyond. Concern over Britain's economic future, into which the theme of interdependence has fitted well, and anger at the Government's attitude to North-South issues have enabled the analysis and recommendations of the Brandt Report to be comfortably fitted into many NGO campaigns and activities. Food and aid, and to a lesser extent (among the general audience) the international monetary system and multinationals, have been the issues most commonly

picked out by people as important ones on which to act. To this must be added the whole issue of disarmament, and its link with development, which may lead to a stronger (and powerful) link between the two constituencies.

Many NGOs continue all the same to have profound doubts about the ethos of the Brandt Report (interdependence, mutual interest), about some of its specific recommendations (or lack of them, eg on multinationals), and its pre-occupation with government-to-government links. But the Report's moral language and its argument for a just, equitable, prosperous and secure world have undoubtedly been an important unifying theme and rallying call.

NGOs see Brandt as a way to emerge from the church-based, student middle-class ghetto in which the development lobby has hitherto remained. WDM has dramatically tripled its individual membership during

1980—it attributes this to the interest in development issues aroused by the combination of the Brandt Report, recession in the UK and the present British Government policy. Whether NGOs will be able to build and expand on the present burst of interest about Brandt is the big test of the immediate future.

Many NGOs feel that, to sustain public interest, concern with the Brandt Report must now be brought down from the general level to specific issues and concrete action and recommendations. That could accentuate many of the differences to be found in the NGOs' response to Brandt which are graphically illustrated by the quotations at the beginning of this article. Action on the Brandt Report is, perhaps, 'a campaign which can reach the parts of the public other campaigns cannot reach'. But it also represents a fundamental challenge to the solidarity, philosophy and organisational base of the UK development lobby itself.