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## The rift

Fontanel, Jacques, Antipas Touatam

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La Conférence de l'OMC à Cancun n'a pas renforcé la confiance des pays africain dans le processus de globalisation proposé par les Etats-Unis et l'Europe. Elle s'est soldée par un échec. Soutenue par la communauté des organisations non gouvernementales, elle a souhaité défendre ses droits et remettre en cause un système à la fois injuste et inefficace. Les droits de douane de produits agricoles et des activités manuelles dans les pays développés sont élevés, particulièrement dans les domaines de l'alimentation et de l'habillement, secteurs dans lesquels les pays en développement disposent d'un certain avantage comparatif. En outre, les pays développés, notamment les Etats-Unis, subventionnent leur agriculture, même pour l'exportation. Il s'agit de manœuvres déloyales. La production du coton est caractéristique de la situation, avec une surproduction due aux subventions nationales des pays développés dans ce secteur. Les 25.000 producteurs de coton américains reçoivent plus de subvention que 500 millions d'Africains dans l'aide au développement. L'Afrique cherche son unité pour combattre et faire cesser ce dumping.

The WTO Conference in Cancun did not strengthen the confidence of African countries in the globalization process proposed by the United States and Europe. It ended in failure. Supported by the community of non-governmental organizations, it sought to defend its rights and challenge a system that is both unjust and inefficient. Tariffs on agricultural products and manual activities in developed countries are high, particularly in the areas of food and clothing, sectors in which developing countries have a certain comparative advantage. In addition, developed countries, especially the United States, subsidize their agriculture, even for exports. These are unfair manoeuvres. Cotton production is characteristic of the situation, with overproduction due to the domestic subsidies of developed countries in this sector. The 25,000 U.S. cotton farmers receive more subsidies than 500 million Africans in development aid. Africa is seeking unity to combat and stop this dumping.

Mots clés : OMC, aide internationale, concurrence, dumping, produits agricoles, exportations

agricultural products, exports, WTO, international aid, competition, dumping, dumping, exports, international aid.

According to James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, “the control levers are in the hands of very few and too many people have too little to hope. Too many excesses, too many wars. Too much suffering.”<sup>1</sup> A billion of people possess 80% of the world’s gross domestic product and another billion lives on less than one dollar a day. Developed countries annually grant US \$ 56 billion of development aid, against US \$ 300 billion of agricultural subsidies and more than US \$ 700 billion of defense spending.

It is necessary to find a solution to the structural problems of poor economies, in particular the problem of debt and evident disbalance of current international accounts. This question could also be addressed to the United States, a country whose debt is constantly growing. It seems that it is necessary to correct the distribution of income between rich and poor countries. Today, according to James Wolfensohn, debt relief is insufficient and the level of aid was never so low.

The Cancun meeting hasn’t reinforced confidence in the world. The 5<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which took place on September 10-14, 2003, in Cancun, Mexico, ended with a failure for the process of globalization encouraged by the United States and Europe. If developing countries were not always united during these commercial negotiations, they nevertheless were at the origin of the retreat of the North’s globalist pretensions.

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Africa has again played an important role, even though it is undoubtedly probably presumptuous to describe it as decisive.

The four so-called "Singapore topics" that were on the Cancun agenda concerned the launching of negotiations on investments, competition, transparency of public markets and facilitating trade. These topics have been supposedly badly dealt with. From the very beginning the representative of Botswana announced, on behalf the African group, that the delegations which he represented would not negotiate without first obtaining certain concessions in the agricultural domain.

Africa, which was strongly supported the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and followed by many developing countries, took a strong stand regarding this claim. One must mention that customs duties in the countries of the Quadrilateral (the United States, Canada, Europe, Japan) are high, particularly in the domain of food products and clothing, where developing countries have a certain degree of comparative advantage.

It is not therefore surprising that the 49 LDCs (Least Developed Countries) warned that they preferred to have no agreement than a bad agreement. According to the Minister of Trade of Bangladesh, Amir Khosru Chowdhury, agricultural production is the only possibility for the LDCs to integrate into world trade, where these poor countries have been marginalized, or even despised of, with their part having fallen from 3% in the 1960s to barely 0,4% today. This is why developing countries accuse the developed nations, at least in the domain of agricultural production, of unfair competition.

### **A Demurrer**

In Cancun the African countries' main claim concerned lifting the agricultural subsidies granted by the European Union and the United States to their producers. This demand is easily explained by the disastrous consequences of these subsidies for African economies.

The three agricultural tracks challenged in the WTO concern domestic support for agricultural production, subsidies for exports and providing market access to emerging countries. The main disagreement between the protagonists is focused on subsidies granted to agricultural producers in developed countries. The African claims are justified by the



sector-based structure of the protection<sup>2</sup> of markets in the North, which is the result half a century of negotiations between the (rich) countries of the North in the framework of GATT, and then the WTO.

The liberalization achieved since World War II concerned products that interested the industrialized countries, leaving two sectors of high market protection – agriculture and manual industries. The protective level of the markets in the Quadrilateral is especially high in these two sectors (agriculture and textiles), which are precisely the domains where African countries are strong. It is interesting, in this context, to take the example of cotton.

According to the African Cotton Association, of the world market of cotton currently suffers from malfunctioning and disloyal practices. However, Africa's cotton production has many comparative advantages. The peasant organizations of the three main cotton-producing countries in West Africa (Mali, Benin and Burkina Faso), along with a Malagasy regional organization, expressed their deep concern as far as in November 2001.

According to a recent survey by the British NGO Oxfam, “the United States, the second producer of cotton after China, pay three times more money to its 25,000 cotton producers than to 500 million Africans via development aid<sup>3</sup>.” These subsidies encourage overproduction and cheap exports. They bring world prices down and cause losses in human lives in Africa and in other developing countries. Without this aid by developed countries to their cotton producers the prices of cotton production would be three times higher in the United States than in Chad or Burkina-Faso.

Competition is distorted, because these subsidies considerably encourage American producers to the detriment of their counterparts in the South, by allowing the agricultural producers in the North to produce at a cost which is much lower than the real cost price. Finally, the subsidies allow the producers in developed countries to better resist the crisis caused by fall-offs in market prices, which is another difficulty in the competitive relationship between the cotton producers in the countries of the South and those of the North. Africa doesn't call for an exceptional status, but, on the contrary, for the respect, by all, of the rules of the World Trade Organization.

The case of cotton is exemplary. It is a vital source<sup>4</sup> of revenue for

most African countries. In Benin cotton represents 75% of the country's export revenues. It is the number one export product (notably in Chad) and an important source of foreign currency resources (for instance, a half in Mali). In Burkina-Faso cotton production accounts for 60% of export revenue and nearly 40% of the gross domestic product. Apart from bringing in foreign currency cotton production is beneficial from other points of view: the oil extracted from cottonseeds provides for about a half of food oil consumption in these countries.

In other words, cotton is a vital product for Africa, but certainly not for the United States. The producers of this market are supplanted because of the subsidies granted to the producers in developed countries, notably in the United States. African countries have received up to now not only no compensation, all they have received, for the meantime, is a demurrer.

Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize winner in economics and former First Vice-President of the World Bank, shares this analysis. "With such subsidies (4 billions of dollars annually), the farmers in the United States are tempted to produce enormous quantities of cotton, provoking a considerable fall-off of prices<sup>5</sup>." In these conditions the subsidies granted to American producers must be lifted. "The West has demanded free trade conditions for the products that it exports, but simultaneously it continued to protect its domestic sectors that could have been threatened by competition on the part of developing countries<sup>6</sup>."

This is notably the case in the domain of agriculture. It is also true about the sector of services, which is open in the domain of financial services and information technologies, but not in the fields of maritime services and construction where developing countries could have been competitive. In the struggle against cocaine production Western countries called for substitution crops, but refused to open their markets to these new products.

As for Europe, it is also challenged. According to Pascal Lamy, the EU's trade commissioner, the European union only produces 2% of the world's cotton, which doesn't make it very influential as far as market prices are concerned. Besides, he recalls that the cotton exported by African LDCs enters the European Union's market without any customs duties, and that the latter imports large quantities of textile products. Therefore, the fundamental pragmatic question is about the European

Union's position regarding the African countries' claims.

In this context, Jaya Krishna Cuttaree, the Minister of Trade and Industry of Mauritius, speaking on behalf of the African Union, affirms that demands on customs duties presented to the President of the Conference on agriculture have never been satisfied. This contempt for the poorest countries shows that beyond the specific question of agriculture, the problem of representation of each State in the international organizations in charge of the process of globalization is questionable.

### **Narrow Room for Maneuver**

President Bush's United States intends to develop bilateral and regional free trade agreements, which should reinforce the American position in the WTO<sup>7</sup>. These agreements are aimed at reinforcing the security of friendly countries such as Morocco or at supporting (at least officially) democracy.

In fact this policy is especially aimed at increasing the negotiation strength of American diplomacy. In reality, if these bilateral and regional agreements attract new partners they do not exercise any noticeable influence on the US economy. American negotiators put pressure on representatives of other countries for opening their boundaries to their companies and products without providing anything in return to the agriculture of the latter. America often practices a "beggar-thy-neighbor" policy.

Besides, the present action of the South prompts it to reject the protective policies regarding American agriculture, by considering the globally negative impact of these agreements on their national economies. In this context the information provided by NGOs appeared to be decisive in this rejection of negotiations without taking into account the agricultural sector. The failure of the negotiations is particularly due to developed countries.

Faced with the new alliances within the WTO, African countries have rather narrow room for maneuver in the framework of commercial negotiations. In the agricultural domain there are six alliances: the G-90 group consists of ACP (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) countries, LDCs (Least Developed Countries) and of AU (African Union) member states; the



G-22 group notably includes Argentina, Brazil, Australia and South Africa; the G-10 group consists of Japan, South Korea, Norway and Switzerland; the EU (European Union); the United States; the "Cairn" group consists notably of Canada, Indonesia, New Zealand and Malaysia.

All these different groups have different claims. In Cancun the surprise came from the G-22 group that put the North-South rift into the focus of the negotiations. The G-90 and G-10 groups played a secondary role, but their positions were radical. African countries united in an alliance of the G-90 group, while the most protectionist countries in the agricultural domain formed the G-10 group. These new alliances revealed the divisions within the WTO. However, it is still true that African countries have narrow room for maneuver in order to obtain satisfaction in the framework of global commercial negotiations.

Simulations carried out on the basis of the Mirage model allowed to evaluate the impact of agricultural liberalization according to the modalities of the Harbinson proposition (President of the Committee on agricultural negotiations). It implies lifting export subsidies, reducing by more than a half of domestic support related to production, and a non-linear reduction of customs tariffs. A particular and differentiated treatment is envisaged in favor of developing countries. In the case of the reform of the common agricultural policy, adopted in June 2003, the envisaged results are interesting.

Rich countries (notably the European Union and developed Asia) seem to benefit from a gain of real wealth, because the competitive distortions caused by trade barriers would be partially eliminated. On the other hand, their agricultural exports would be affected by a relative decrease in volume unlike that of the developed countries of the Cairn group that would largely benefit from such measures, along with the former USSR, developed Asia and the non-European Mediterranean countries.

Developing countries would globally benefit from this reform and the world trade of agricultural products would increase by 4.7% in volume annually. The results depend, in fact, on the agricultural and industrial structure of every country or group of countries. The suspension of domestic support especially concerns cotton, sugar, oleaginous plants and rice; export subsidies mainly affect sugar and dairy products.

Africa's narrow room for maneuver in the framework of commercial



negotiations is mainly explained by the poorly diversified character of the LDC's exports (for instance, cotton, bananas and sugar in the case of ACP countries). Meanwhile, many African countries belong to the LDC group, notably West and Central African countries. As far as African countries are concerned, the generalized opening of their markets to all developing countries would mean an erosion of their preferences.

Of course, the new competition between the countries of the South can seriously affect the poorest countries. Thus, some countries that don't produce certain products buy their commodities in developed countries at subsidized prices. When these will no longer be available, the "liberalized" world price will impose itself and it will probably be higher than the one that is currently offered by developed countries. This will lead to "perverse effects" for African countries that will be forced either to produce these products themselves (but at higher cost, at least in the beginning), or to purchase them at a higher price.

Thus, the elimination of customs duties on international markets exceeding 15% would improve the situation of the least developed countries, but to a limited extent. If one wants the results to be useful this decision must be exclusively reserved for them.

This particular problem eventually calls for parallel measures. These could take the form of new commercial advantages and development aid granted to LDCs. The analysis of the consequences of total liberalization of world trade of manufactured products confirms this statement.

According to CEPII<sup>8</sup>, the world exports of manufactured products would progress by more than 12%, and this growth would exceed 30% in the case of Argentina, India, the Maghreb, South Asia and Brazil. On the other hand, exports of sub-Saharan Africa would only increase by 11% because of the elimination of the commercial preferences which this region benefits from. Thus, the liberalization of world trade would lead to a new distribution of world wealth which, in terms of market share, would not be especially favorable for Africa.

The reduction of poverty via growth is an essential objective. IMF aid mechanisms are important. NEPAD helps Africa understand that it must be itself responsible for its development. African countries call for having a stronger voice and representation in the framework of Bretton Woods institutions so that their policies are brought in line with Africa's long-term interests. Other developing countries and countries in transi-

tion make the same claims.

According to James Wolfensohn, "after Cancun we agreed that it is necessary to achieve a better balance between the voices of developed and developing countries<sup>9</sup>." In this framework it is necessary to fight against corruption and improve the transparency of productive and financial operations. However, for Ritchie and Dawkins<sup>10</sup> the Cancun meeting rather was a success. It defined the conditions according to which the market can be beneficial for the poor and how developing countries can become real actors in the framework of international negotiations. These negotiations allowed to redefine the notion of "fair trade," a balanced market for the benefit of developed as well as developing countries.

Cancun taught three major lessons:

- Just and objective agreements cannot be properly negotiated when the balance of power is exclusively in favor of the richest countries.
- The civil society can play a legitimate and useful role in these discussions. Many governments showed solidarity with non-governmental groups that provided them with technical and political support. For the first time developing countries could have a staff of technicians during the negotiations, comparable to the staffs of industrialized countries. The information provided to the negotiators was essential in cases of certain refusals or numerous claims.
- A fair and just market is a market that provides just payment for its producers, decent wages for its workers in order to involve the world in the process of sustainable development. The International Fair Trade Fair wishes to develop a world market based on the interests of poor. This implies taking into account the work of children and women. This association gives an idea of another form of development respecting the interests of people. It is necessary to assure that producers benefit from a loyal price and that wage-earning employees receive a normal salary. One no longer speaks of a more balanced market, but of creating a loyal market.

This is the first time that the WTO is beginning to become a real global organization, not only an extension of the national and foreign policies of the American government. Cancun is therefore a sign of a rift, of the willingness to change the balance of power in the domain of world economic policies.

The free market is in fact only a system of deregulating the market.



Ten years ago the poorest countries were told, on the basis of sophisticated models, that the opening of their economy to foreign competition would assure high growth rates of their economies. The result is not very satisfactory. One can even say that some countries experienced a real form of relative pauperization, which in some cases was even absolute.

But the disloyal practices of American agricultural producers, which excluded from the competition a number of producers because of American subsidies, are the most disloyal case. They also increased the need of many countries in agricultural and food imports, with serious consequences in terms of risks of famine.

### **Strategies of Unity**

There is a real dominant liberal creed<sup>11</sup>. This is the new fundamentalism regarding the undeniable therapeutic virtues of the market. However, the current economic globalization has no equivalent in the political domain. The nation-state is not necessarily always too small to respond to contemporary challenges, even though the Chernobyl accident underlines the increasing distortion between the sovereign model and the technological and environmental realities. The national level is still important, but it is no longer the main strategic interlocutor for key actors of scientific development, technological innovation and socioeconomic growth.

As far as African countries are concerned, the 5<sup>th</sup> WTO conference in Cancun revealed their unity and their will to defend their positions in the framework of commercial negotiations. This is a real political success. For the first time African countries were able to put on the agenda a topic that affects them directly. Supported by non-governmental organizations, Africa has new assets, but the latter, because of the inherent selfishness of the current process of globalization, can't always play a decisive role in the international game.

Having won their political successes gotten in Cancun, African countries decided to stay united in the prospect of future negotiations. Today the entire international opinion agrees that the failure of Cancun is mainly due to the fact that the participating countries were not able to smooth out their disagreements on the Singapore agenda. In reality the countries

of the South begin to grumble about the demands of the developed countries.

Six African Finance Ministers (Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala of Nigeria, Michel Meva'a Meboutou of Cameroon, Ng'andu P. Magande of Zambia, Ali Badjo Gamatie of Niger, B.R. Kukuri of Namibia and Jean-Baptiste Compaoré of Burkina-Faso) referred, on September 20, 2003, to the big challenges Africa is faced with<sup>12</sup>. From their point of view, the Cancun Conference didn't improve Africa's access to the markets of industrialized countries.

In these conditions it will be difficult to achieve the famous MDOs (Millennium Development Objectives) which imply increased and sustained aid on the part of the international community. African countries are undertaking painful structural reforms in order to achieve these objectives, but the question of financing hasn't still been resolved. Without aid the objectives will be utopian. France and the United Kingdom proposed an international financing mechanism, but it hasn't still been set up.

Tight cooperation between the World Bank and the IMF is necessary to create an international development mechanism. According to Kukuri, Namibia's Minister of Finance, the total liberalization of world trade would allow at least 300 millions of people to overcome poverty by 2015. But it is also a double-edged arm, because the economist too often reasons in terms of the "ceteris paribus" hypothesis.

The slowness of progress in the field of debt relief is still a phenomenon that causes concern. The PHICs (Poor Heavy Indebted Countries) initiative hasn't yet mobilized all the available resources. The process of negotiations evolves very slowly. However, the debt burden and its service greatly reduce the potential of growth and development.

The prospects of the world economy do not provide for implementing the MDOs, notably because of the volatility of the prices of basic products, the progress of AIDS, rarely kept promises by developed countries and the delay in reforming the Bretton Woods institutions. The refusal of developed countries to open their boundaries for agricultural products is one of the negative aspects of globalization. The failure of the negotiations in Cancun will have an important aftereffect on the confidence towards the countries of the North.

Beyond the technical aspects, the political positions of the parties involved hardly changed. No other issue will be dealt with until the questions put by developing countries are resolved. On the other hand, deve-



veloped countries wish to resume the negotiations on the basis of the entire world market.

In order to attempt to reconcile these antagonistic positions a delicate balance had been constructed in Doha. Implementation questions regarding the negotiations launched in the new cycle are dealt with in the framework of these negotiations. Respective WTO bodies deal with other, so-called «suspended» questions. Today no progress has been made in order to reconcile the two points of view, in spite of mediation efforts by the WTO Director-General.

The discussions are influenced by ideological positions. For some, subsidies are, by nature, noxious; for others, the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) is untouchable. In all situations developing countries are victims of an unjust system. Developing countries fundamentally wish to benefit for some time from the liberalization of the world economy, like the major powers did. But in spite of the idea of a globalization developing interdependency, the concepts of solidarity or support to the poorest are not a “reality” in a world of exacerbated competition, globally controlled by the richest countries, that are themselves involved in a process of constant mutual competition.

The failure of Cancun casts doubt on the possibility of negotiated international relations. It is a failure of the Doha cycle. However, for Köhler of the International Monetary Fund trade is the most powerful driving force of world growth and reduction of poverty. Authentic political will is necessary in order to overcome the deadlock and it is urgent to return to the table of negotiations.

The key to success is in the hands of countries, since the problem stems from agriculture. Developing countries are victims of discrimination, which hinders their development and obliges them to experience rather unfavorable terms of trade<sup>13</sup>.

After the failure of Cancun, the Doha (Qatar) cycle is in a difficult situation. Of course, the Conference’s final communiqué mentions that the discussions will be resumed at the WTO General Council. But, as Pascal Lamy, the European negotiator, points out, it is difficult to hope that an agreement of ambassadors will be achieved where their ministers have failed. Henceforth, the cycle launched in November 2001 in Doha risks not to end by the programmed date, that is on January 1, 2005. The refusal of African countries to accept negotiations even on one of the four

vailing in the industrial sector.

The annual assembly of the IMF that met on September 20-24, 2003, proposed to resume commercial negotiations, seek to implement the MDOs and examine the issue of reconstruction of Iraq. The spirit of cooperation is maintained, in spite of the failure of Cancun. Current geopolitical uncertainties are leveled down, the deferred effects of the stock market bubble are fading away and takeoff measures begin to produce results.

However, one witnesses today the dissociation of the national (domain of democratic control) and of the transnational where the real stakes are. This allows the economic system to develop beyond democratic control. Africa recalls that it also deserves to express its voice. In these conditions the processes of development and globalization risk being profoundly modified.

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