

Can Japan be a bridge from North to South?

by Linda de Hoyos

Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's declaration in New Delhi, India on May 1 that Japan is uniquely suited to act as a "bridge between the North and South," has been dismissed in Washington think-tanker circles as a "nice phrase." But in the three weeks since he completed his tour to the Indian subcontinent, Nakasone has made this concept the foundation of his policy toward the underdeveloped nations.

On May 27, Brazilian President João Figueiredo arrived in Tokyo for a state visit, which resulted in Japan's granting of \$756 million in new credits to the Ibero-American debtor country, nearly three times more than the Brazilian President had expected. Only six days before his arrival in Japan, Figueiredo had signed the May 19 four-nation communiqué—with Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina—that launched the Ibero-American debtors' cartel. Instead of being treated in Tokyo to lectures on the necessity to bend to the loan conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund and the bankers at the expense of the economy, Figueiredo received credit from Japan—credits that will make possible the continuation of Brazil's industrial projects.

If this is not an outright endorsement of the Ibero-American countries' debtors' club, it is a demonstration that the Nakasone government is acting on an understanding that neither debtor- nor creditor-countries will profit if Ibero-America's productive capacities are destroyed. That makes Nakasone unique among the group of seven leaders who will meet at the London summit of OECD industrialized nations June 7-9.

The same approach was taken in the Joint Japan-Egypt Committee meeting in Tokyo May 26. The Committee was formed last year as a result of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's trip to Japan. When Mubarak came to the United States in February to call upon the White House to move on the Reagan plan following the pullout of U.S. Marines from Lebanon, his efforts to discuss the Mideast were shrugged off, and he was instead told that Egypt must accede to IMF demands to cut government food subsidies.

In contrast, deliberations of the Japan-Egypt Joint Committee centered on efforts to resolve the Iran-Iraq war. Egyptian Deputy Foreign Minister El Shafie and his Japanese counterpart Nakajima discussed how Japan would speak up

for the countries of the South at the London summit. The Japanese also promised that they will raise the issue of aid to starvation-stricken Africa.

There are two obstacles to Nakasone's fulfilling the role of representative of the South before the forums of the industrialized countries. First is the United States. Nakasone is considered the most pro-American nationalist within the political spectrum of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. The Japanese budget reflects his commitments: Allocations were increased in only two areas, defense and foreign aid. It is unlikely that under current strategic conditions Nakasone would carry out any international economic policy that would force a rupture of his relations with the White House. The war in the Persian Gulf, the source for 65% of Japan's oil needs, has placed an additional burden on Nakasone. A total oil cut-off in the Gulf would make Japan heavily dependent upon U.S. supplies.

Secondly, within the broad consensus that shapes Japanese policy, Nakasone finds opponents, however the difference is mooted, to his economic intentions. These are from the faction around ex-Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda.

Fukuda, a member of the Trilateral Commission, chaired a conference of former heads of state in Yugoslavia May 26, attended by West German Social Democrats Helmut Schmidt and Willy Brandt and former U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim. The conference took a unanimous position for global disarmament, and will send delegations to Moscow and Washington to seek renewal of arms negotiations.

Within this context, the conference also discussed "Third World indebtedness." The U.S. budget deficit and high interest rates were cited as major reasons for monetary instability, which participants believe could cause a financial collapse. But, the conference warned, the underdeveloped countries must adhere strictly to the rules of the International Monetary Fund.

On the face of it, there is not much difference in wording between the resolutions passed under Fukuda's leadership at the former heads of state conference and statements to which Prime Minister Nakasone would adhere. Yet the two leaders approach the question from completely different standpoints. Fukuda is carrying out his international endeavors with the close cooperation of the the Club of Rome, according to the genocide lobby's executive director, Alexander King. That places him squarely in the faction of Japanese Club of Rome member Ichi Okita, who is working to make Japan the linchpin of a supranational bureaucracy—an Asian OECD—that would police the neo-colonialist debt-equity plans of the London, New York, and Swiss banks to "solve" the debt crisis (see article, page 34).

Nakasone's impulse is to take the lead in bringing together a community of principle among nations, under the direction of heads of state, for technological progress. On the crucial issues of national sovereignty and the necessity for industrialization, Nakasone stands with the Ibero-American debtors' cartel.