
Book Review

Deafening silence from the Non-Aligned

by Susan Maitra

Non-Aligned Movement: New Delhi and Beyond

by Pradeep Mathur and K.M. Shrivastava
Sterling Publishers Private, Ltd.
New Delhi, RS70

More than a year has passed since the Seventh Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) convened in auspicious circumstances in New Delhi under the chairmanship of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. While Mrs. Gandhi, in her capacity as head of the movement, has pressed forward diplomatic initiatives to find a solution to the Iran-Iraq war and the murderous stalemate in southern Africa, these have been without notable success or even impact. More to the point is the deafening silence of the Non-Aligned Movement on the one issue central to the peace and sovereign economic development that is the cornerstone of the movement and the urgent concern of each of its 104 members—namely, international monetary reform.

It is in this context that this slim volume by two experienced Indian journalists is of interest. Written even before the euphoria of the movement's return "home, to its roots"—with all the promise for new strength and potency that conveyed—had died down, this book portrays a movement in profound crisis. The book is a searching and compassionate look at a movement whose manifest impotence ought to provoke deep disquiet. Courage is required to acknowledge it, and to then plow through the litanies of self-serving formulas on all sides to seize the cause—and thereby the remedy. Mathur and Shrivastava have made a useful beginning to this task.

In the preface, the authors point to the fact that, as an antidote to the Western criticism of the Non-Aligned movement, there is a tendency to defend everything about the movement—any attempt at self-analysis is often considered "blasphemous." The authors reject this approach as "self-defeating." The obstruction, the cynicism, indeed the outright sabotage of the process of decolonization and nation-building in the developing countries, is well known and doc-

umented. Not ignoring these obstacles, the authors nonetheless emphasize that the Non-Aligned member nations must take up full responsibility for themselves and their movement.

Weaknesses of the NAM

Ultimately, they argue, responsibility for the movement's weakness must rest with the member governments themselves, inasmuch as their citizenry remains impoverished and politically unenlightened. And thus, even the movement's putative moral authority remains nominal. From this standpoint, the sterility of the battle over the two issues which have most exercised conference delegates—the Iran-Iraq war and the Kampuchea issue—is better understood.

The three middle chapters, grouped around the core economic issues, begin to get to the heart of the matter. The world financial crisis is strangling both the North and the South. Based on a political economy of feudalism, the Bretton Woods monetary system is perhaps the single most systematic point of aggression against the full development as sovereign nation-states of the countries of the so-called South, who emerged from colonial domination in the late 1940s and 1950s to form the Non-Aligned Movement. This matter was squarely posed during the Seventh Summit, and, despite substantial consensual watering-down, the summit determined upon an important initiative—the proposed conference on money and finance for development, with universal participation. It is in respect of this initiative in particular that the Non-Aligned Movement's silence is so deafening at the present moment.

But as the chapter on South-South cooperation describes, the unity and muscle within NAM to press such initiatives is inadequate. To begin with, the unity is only skin deep. The rhetoric of cooperation seems to proliferate in inverse proportion to the ability or determination to press proposals into implementation. Mathur and Shrivastava discuss food production as a case in point. The lack of cooperation, and even outright sabotage from the developed North, is easily documented, but the authors make a convincing case that the developing nations have among themselves the wherewithal

to achieve food self-sufficiency and insist that this challenge be taken up as a top priority.

The next to the last two chapters present the dialectic in terms of the news media. Chapter 8 is an excellent documented summary of Western press coverage of the Seventh Summit, characterized as it was by sheer ignorance, arrogance, and cynicism in equal measure. But as the reader is concluding that there can be no compromise with such arbitrary evil, the authors sound the counterpoint: The vaunted "New World Information Order" is largely a fraud, as shown in Chapter 9, and it won't do to blame the North.

Inadequate solutions

The discussion of the future course of NAM in the final chapter is a disappointment for the reader who anticipates a ground-breaking *prescription*. The suggestion to set up a "crisis-management" mechanism is obviously inadequate to the questions and dilemmas that have been raised in the preceding chapters. The recommendation that the movement must evolve an "ideological minimum" to guide unified action is more to the point—at least as far as this means bringing into focus the historical and political-philosophical reference points that distinguish nations from colonies. Ultimately, as the authors recognize, the problem is *political* in a profound sense of that term.

The point here, this writer would argue, is not so much some more mumbo-jumbo about "capitalism" or "imperialism," but the question of the modern republican nation-state. What paralyzes NAM is the fact that only a few of the developing countries actually fought through a war for independence analogous to the American Revolution, and that even some of those who did ultimately experienced the end of colonial rule as a mere transfer of power. That the United States has largely forgotten its own example does not dull the point. The fight to *construct* a new nation, a democratic republic, never occurred in most of the developing countries, nor did the transformation of the population which that fight entails. Feudal cultural and social relationships and a colonial administrative setup were carried over to frustrate the aims of independence in either case.

One can take issue with the populist bias that reasserts itself repeatedly to distort the authors' deeper insights, just as one can wonder why, after having so precisely portrayed the sterility of ideological position-mongering (as on the Kampuchea issue), the authors nonetheless accept ideological terms of reference for much of the discussion. What is certain, however, is that Mathur and Shrivastava successfully engage the reader, challenging him to take a good look at the problem and to clarify his own thoughts. In this they have helped to initiate a "healthy debate"—their stated aim in writing *Non-Aligned Movement: New Delhi and Beyond*. It should get a wide readership, and not just among the developing sector intellectuals and political leaders to whom it is principally directed.

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