

Non-Aligned Nations Meeting Resolves Nothing

NEW DELHI, APRIL 11 (NSIPS) — One of the participants (not the author) in the meeting of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned countries held in this city summed up the results of the conference simply as: "a waste of time." The Bureau meeting, held on a Foreign Ministers level, was intended to review the progress of the implementation of the declarations and programs adopted at the heads of state summit meeting of the non-aligned held last August in Colombo, Sri Lanka and to assess the current international political and economic situation. What was clear from the start, however, was that no one intended to take any serious initiatives that could create controversy at the meeting and upset the fragile "unity" of the non-aligned movement.

EYEWITNESS REPORT

The task before the meeting was defined by the almost complete failure during the past eight months to implement the 1976 Colombo declarations, themselves a compromise formula, since that summit meeting. Everyone in the non-aligned is aware that little progress has been made, but few are willing to face the necessity for ending the stream of constant talk and taking some decisive action — in particular to force the advanced capitalist countries to seriously negotiate on debt moratoria, the establishment of a new monetary system, and related commitments of the developing countries, and particularly at a moment when the results of inaction are hurtling the world towards war.

The tone of the meeting was set by the inaugural address of Indian Prime Minister Morarji Desai whose theme was "self-help" for the developing countries as the ultimate solution to their severe economic problems. Desai disappointed everyone — Western observers who were hoping to witness a dramatic expression of the new Indian government's alleged "pro-Westernism," and optimists looking for a tougher stand by the non-aligned on the dismal state of the "North-South" dialogue.

In fact, the Indian setting of the meeting, following so closely after the downfall of the Gandhi government, one of the mainstays of the non-aligned movement, was an important numbing factor here. The Indian government, as the hosts of the meeting and following non-aligned standard procedure, was responsible for drawing up the draft political and economic communiqués for the conference. On the whole, as many delegates lamented in private, the drafts were extremely weak and in certain cases represented a step backward from the positions taken at Colombo. Within the committees where the drafts were discussed the Yugoslavs, in the spirit of

keeping "unity," worked with the Indians to keep the proceedings smooth and quiet. The drafts raised little open controversy, although a number of the more radical members of the Bureau succeeded in forcing changes in the drafts such that the final communiqué at least held the line at the Colombo position.

The plenary session of the conference, where the Foreign Ministers delivered their formal speeches, was, even by Third World conference standards, impressive for its anesthetic effect, as minister after minister rose to congratulate the group on the "growing strength of the non-aligned" and their role in the world, and to reaffirm the sacred integrity of previous non-aligned stands on various issues such as southern Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean. Even less attention than would be expected was paid to the international economic situation, a striking avoidance of reality considering the miserable collapse of the Paris North-South and UNC-TAD talks over the past months. These developments were, however, ritually condemned.

There were exceptions to this. Some governments rose to speak about reality in less abstract terms and were in turn heartily congratulated later by their colleagues who, for political reasons at home or out of sheer cowardice, were unable to speak so directly. The speeches of the Cuban, Iraqi, Vietnamese and Angolan Foreign Ministers showed more fight in this regard, particularly on economic issues.

Cuban Foreign Minister Malmierca attacked the role of the developed capitalist nations at the Paris North-South talks and pointed out the sharpening economic crisis characterized by the accelerating debt problem. While he did not make debt a focus of his presentation, Malmierca called for the problem of foreign debt to be "approached outside the IMF" and urged that there be found a "mechanism for the solution of the causes and effects of debt." The Cuban Minister also pointedly called for the Arabs to invest their surplus petrodollars in Third World development.

The Vietnamese address was even more harsh on these issues than the Cubans. The Vietnamese Foreign Minister, referring to the North-South stalemate, said: "Imperialism will never voluntarily make concessions to the non-aligned and developing countries and will never accept at the negotiating table what is unfavorable to it." Unfortunately the Vietnamese, like the others, had little concrete to offer in the way of a solution to this impasse.

This stagnant view of the international economic situation was reflected in the Economic Committee itself, where the actual work of the conference was carried out in discussion of the draft communiqué. By all accounts the work in the committees was nearly as stirring as what occurred on the floor of the plenary. Some fight

was conducted by a group of countries, led by Guyana, Jamaica, Sudan and Iraq in forcing a toughening of the draft; but one of the participants in this, commenting on the meeting, was disgusted with the complete lack of serious discussion.

On the North-South issue, the best these weary diplomats could come up with, was a commitment that if the Paris talks failed in its final session, the developing countries should bring the issue back to the United Nations — once again — and hold yet another meeting of ministers to decide on what action should be taken. Veterans of such conferences say this is not exactly an innovative solution.

On the political side the fare was even more meager. The Political Committee, chaired by the Cuban delegation, was the scene of an effort by numerous of the more radical states to prevent a backslide from stands taken previously. By the account of one Arab participant, the first excitement of the meeting was an effort by the Zaire delegation to open up a nominalist discussion on the definition of non-alignment. The excursions into semantic niceties was abruptly halted when several delegates politely pointed out to the Zaireans that defining non-alignment should hardly be a burning issue at this point, although perhaps the Zaireans are having some difficulty in this regard.

From that point on the meeting was downhill, as the linguistic debate shifted to wrangles over the wording of the draft, adjective by adjective. In one case the Indian delegate objected to the wording proposed that called for

the U.S. to “promptly” conclude its negotiations with Panama on the new canal treaty. A Latin American delegate reminded his colleague that the United Nations General Assembly had passed a resolution calling for the negotiations to be concluded by the end of the year and suggested that perhaps his Indian friend would prefer the word “immediately.” This test of wills was finally settled with the Indian relenting to the use of the word “promptly.”

The Bureau meeting left many delegates wondering why it had been held. One participant from Africa commented that: “It’s just the same faces going from conference to the next talking to each other.” This, of course, need not have been the outcome had some of the participants been willing to inject a few undiluted doses of reality into the conference. The closest there was to that was on the southern African question where the Cubans, Angolans and others made some strong statements on the U.S. efforts to encourage confrontation there, and called for full backing for the frontline African states and the liberation movements in Rhodesia, Namibia, and South Africa. Surprisingly, even the Indian Foreign Minister was unequivocal on this question and voiced Indian support for armed struggle if necessary to overthrow the racist regimes.

But the initiative for a new world economic order that will quench Carter’s war and looting plans will not come from the non-aligned; it has been left for others.

— Daniel Snieder

The Non-Aligned Nations’ Communiqué

Below are some excerpts from the final communiqué adopted at the Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Countries which took place from April 6-11 in New Delhi, India. The members of the Bureau (the official steering committee of the movement) are: Algeria, Angola, Bangladesh, Botswana, Chad, Cuba, Guinea, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jamaica, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Palestine Liberation Organization, Peru, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Zaire, Zambia.

Africa

9. In Africa, despite the fact that the struggle for freedom has intensified and developed, imperialism continues to obstruct the right to self-determination and the achievement of freedom and independence by the peoples of this continent, thus perpetuating the existence of racist and minority regimes and encouraging foreign occupation and domination.

10. In their attempts to destabilize African countries and affect their right to sovereignty, the forces of imperialism have increasing recourse to interference and intervention, to the use of mercenaries, political assassinations and causing conflicts between friendly neighbouring countries.

11. The Bureau expressed its deep indignation and condemnation of such acts. It called for vigilance and

solidarity by the non-aligned nations in order to bring to its conclusion the irreversible process of political, economic and cultural freedom of their nations and to continue their support to the freedom movements that are struggling towards these objectives.

Southern Africa

12. The Bureau reviewed the developments in Southern Africa since the Colombo Summit Conference of Non-Aligned countries. It expressed its concern at the further deterioration of the situation in the area arising from the continued intransigent and repressive policies of the racist minority regimes in their desperate determination to maintain the ruthless system of colonialism, apartheid and racial discrimination. Not only have the racist minority regimes broadened and intensified their oppression of the African peoples of Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa but they have also become increasingly more aggressive and provocative against the neighbouring independent African States.

Detente

64. The Bureau welcomed the progress achieved in the relaxation of tensions between the Great Powers. At the same time the Bureau reiterated that detente to be effective and meaningful, must be extended to all parts of the world and should benefit all countries, developed and developing, big and small, in keeping with the spirit of

absolute respect for national sovereignty, non-aggression, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

65. The Bureau notes with satisfaction the efforts of European non-aligned and neutral countries to secure the success of the Belgrade Follow-up Meeting to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Recalling the position of the Colombo Conference concerning the Mediterranean, the Bureau underlines the need for the intensification of the efforts of the Non-aligned Countries of the region aimed at creating conditions for transforming the Mediterranean into a zone of peace and cooperation.

Review of the International Economic Situation

75. The Bureau noted that since the Colombo Summit, the existing unfavourable economic situation in the world is rendered even more difficult due to the absence of any substantive progress towards the restructuring of world economy. There has been little or no improvement in the situation of developing countries. Developing countries continue to face critical situations, both as regards their external trade as well as their growth prospects. The inequalities and imbalances in the international economic structure persist and the economic gap between developed and developing countries continues to widen.

76. While the effects of inflation and recession generated in the developed countries have had serious consequences for developing countries, the measures taken by developed countries to counteract the high rates of inflation and recession have only aggravated the adverse effects on developing countries. In addition, the instability of the international monetary situation, has continued to affect the economies of developing countries. The Bureau, therefore, reiterated the need to adopt ways and means to establish a new rational, equitable and universal monetary system.

78. The Bureau further noted that international measures to assist developing countries to meet the economic crisis have been ad hoc palliatives rather than structural solutions of a comprehensive nature. Measures taken have been shortlived, grossly inadequate and at times even discriminatory. On the other hand, aid flows increased only marginally in nominal terms, while they declined in real terms. Most multilateral institutions such as United Nations Development Programme and International Development Agency were faced with resources crises due both to inflation and inadequate contributions.

79. This trend, together with the rising costs of essential imports of developing countries have forced them to rely on commercial borrowing thus accentuating their debt problems. The situation facing most developing countries, as regards debt servicing, has assumed critical proportions and is likely to be further exacerbated. Their position will continue to be vulnerable, due to the staggeringly large amounts of finance which they have to arrange year after year to repay their debts, thus having an adverse impact on their growth rates.

Conference on International Economic Cooperation

82. The Bureau reaffirmed its strong support to the position adopted by the Group of 19 in its negotiation in

the Conference on International Economic Cooperation being held in Paris. The Bureau expressed its sense of deep concern over the lack of progress at the Conference. The developed countries have not yet responded positively to the concrete proposals submitted by the developing countries in spite of the fact that strenuous efforts have been made for over a year to reach agreement. The Bureau considered that a failure of the Conference on International Economic Cooperation will have serious repercussions on the relations between developing and developed countries. In this connection the Bureau drew attention to the following view expressed in the Economic Declaration adopted at the Fifth Non-Aligned Summit in Colombo: "The developed countries will be held responsible for a failure of the Paris Conference which would result from their persistent refusal to accept the proposals concerning a wide range of questions of importance for the developing countries. Such a failure would prompt the developing countries to reconsider their attitudes".

87. The Bureau also noted with concern that despite the important resolutions adopted at UNCTAD IV in the priority areas, no progress has been achieved so far on the debt problems of developing countries, transfer of resources and commodities. The Bureau felt that the persistent lack of political will on the part of developed countries would have far-reaching negative effects on the prospects of international economic cooperation.

Decisions of the Bureau

97. The Bureau Meeting therefore decided that:

(c) In recognition of the grave economic crisis currently facing developing countries, and bearing in mind their call for solidarity and unity, the Bureau called upon all countries to seriously consider the steps necessary to prevent the failure of the Conference on International Economic Cooperation. The Bureau regretted the delaying tactics of the developed countries and was of the view that the onus was clearly on those countries to ensure that the Conference was able to reach decisions in keeping with the importance and urgency of the issues it had been discussing over the last 12 months. However, it was also imperative that all countries participated in efforts to bring the Conference to a successful conclusion.

(d) The problem of external indebtedness should be dealt with across the board in terms of universally applicable principles and not on a case by case basis except when the debtor country so desired. Debt relief should be regarded as a transfer of resources and not as a device to meet temporary difficulties in the balance of payments.

(e) The Bureau noted that at its resumed thirty-first Session the United Nations General Assembly would consider the outcome of the Conference on International Economic Cooperation. In keeping with the catalytic role played by the non-aligned countries within the Group of 77, the Bureau recommended that on the eve of that Session the Group of 77 should meet at Ministerial level to take stock of the situation and to evolve a further course of joint action at the resumed session. The non-aligned countries should bring their solidarity to bear and preserve their political identity in charting out a combined strategy within the Group of 77 for negotiations with developed countries.