

THIRD WORLD

Why the Third World listens to Castro

Under Cuba's leadership, Nonaligned summit launches battle for development

In the two short weeks since the conclusion of the Sixth Summit of Nonaligned Nations in Havana, Cuba, major changes have begun to take shape in the Third World. Most visible has been the fact that the heads of state of two important Nonaligned countries are no longer in power. Nur Mohammad Taraki of Afghanistan was replaced by his powerful Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin on Sept. 17, and Agostinho Neto of Angola—the revered father of that nation's independence—died of leukemia after a long illness. These two nations play a pivotal role in the lineup of political forces in their respective regions and the power struggles that will emerge in these areas in the wake of the two leaders disappearance from the political scene will have major strategic significance for the future of the entire Third World.

That future course, as the *Executive Intelligence Review* explained in last week's cover story on the Nonaligned Summit, will be largely influenced by the leadership of Cuban President Fidel Castro. In the "post mortems" of the summit now going on in every international capital, many officials are still scratching their heads in disbelief at the way Cuba's aggressive leadership placed the Nonaligned Movement on a firm war-footing against the International Monetary Fund and its depression-inducing economic policies. Many are wondering: Was it Fidel's "charisma" that won the Third World over? Or was it the case that Cuban representatives "abused their condition of host country" and "manipulated" the summit into adopting unpopular positions in the Economic and Political Committees?

More astute observers have noted, however, that Castro was in fact speaking for the large "silent majority" of Third World leaders; that he was expressing out loud what they only thought privately; and that he delivered an inaugural speech that most Third World

leaders wished they still had the moral authority to give without hypocrisy.

A critical element in establishing Castro's total credibility as an anti-imperialist leader in the eyes of the Nonaligned, was the Cuban nation itself. It was there for every visitor to Havana to see. Countless journalists and official delegates—of *all* political persuasions—expressed to this reporter their (often begrudging) admiration for what Cuba has accomplished in the 20 years since the "Fidelistas" overthrew the drug-running Batista dictatorship. It stood as a model to Third World countries like Nicaragua which, after years of austere dictatorship, are now plotting a course of economic development.

The idea of progress

Cuba, no doubt, had put on its "Sunday best" for the Nonaligned Summit. The Convention Palace and the logistical arrangements for the foreigners were well organized and ran smoothly. But even taking this into account, there is no question but that things have vastly improved in Cuba. The average Cuban is well clothed and adequately fed. Housing is more of a problem, with old houses and other buildings still being commonplace in Havana. But rents are fixed and quite low. There is full employment in Cuba, as well as a strong centralization of the economy in the hands of the state. The necessity of such an approach to achieve development, especially in a backward Third World nation like Cuba, is something that would be fully appreciated by a Charles De Gaulle, or our own dirigist nation-builders, Alexander Hamilton and Benjamin Franklin.

Indicative of this approach is the service sector. Most taxi drivers in Havana now work for the state, as salaried employees. One older driver told me that he had been working as a cabbie for 40 years. "Before the

revolution I drove my own cab," he reported. "If I got a flat or the car broke down, I was out for three or four days. Now the government maintains the entire cab fleet; they give me a good new car to drive; and I don't have to *hustle* for a living—now I just work."

Cuba places the highest priority on the education and training of its labor force. Thousands of university and other students are studying abroad in the socialist countries, in much the same way that foreign students come to the United States. Most factories have training or adult education programs which workers are encouraged to attend. One 40-year-old Cuban told me that he only completed grade school before the revolution, but that fortunately his youngest brother had gone to school after 1959, and was now studying veterinary medicine. He was confident that his own children would also become professionals.

This sense of self-improvement, that the next generation will always get further than ours, is firmly imbedded in Cuban society. The idea of progress, that was dominant throughout America before the drug and antigrowth plagues struck our nation, is now alive and well in Cuba. Despite visible shortcomings—such as the disturbing presence of rock music and disco—the Cuban nation has a sense of *purpose*. As one Cuban journalist retorted when informed of the Carter administration's latest threats to Cuba over the alleged presence of 3,000 Soviet troops there: "Why don't they just leave us alone so that we can develop our economy in peace?"

Politics

Most important of all is the sense of relaxed self-confidence that most Cubans display. There is a tremendous, universal sense of pride in their Revolution, and pride in the leadership provided by Fidel Castrol. Only a fool could at this point imagine that Castro could be overthrown from within Cuba.

Cubans are also intensely political, and surprisingly well-informed. Exemplary was a *Prensa Latina* dark-room technician ... who had an extended discussion with this reporter on the latest political turns of Guinea's Sekou Toure!

This is the Cuba that 1,100 foreign journalists and an equal number of foreign delegates saw. There is no question that Soviet aid has played an important role in helping Cuba's economic development—a fact which the Cubans themselves are the first to admit. But it is a nation committed to sovereign development, to industrialization, to preparing its labor force to absorb the most advanced technologies in all areas of economic activity—the very principles of the Nonaligned Movement itself.

This is why the Third World listens to Fidel Castro.

—Dennis Small
Latin America Desk

Nicaragua's Marengo: we're building a nation

Forty days after overthrowing the Somoza dictatorship, the new government of Nicaragua joined the Nonaligned Movement and sent a high-level delegation to the Havana Summit. The Nicaraguan representatives—including Junta members Sergio Ramirez and Daniel Ortega, and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Miguel D'Escoto) and Transportation (Dionisio Marengo)—were enthusiastically received by the other delegations and the press.

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

In the eyes of many, Nicaragua's struggle to develop, its problem of overwhelming foreign debt, its desperate need for reconstruction aid, made it a microcosm of the general problem of the Third World, and special attention was paid to statements by Nicaraguan spokesmen.

Dionisio Marengo, Nicaragua's new Minister of Transportation and Public Works, granted the following interview on Sept. 7 to Dennis Small, Executive Intelligence Review's special correspondent to the Nonaligned Summit in Havana, Cuba.

Small: *Mr. Marengo, 41 days after the revolution, what can you tell us about the economic conditions in your country, the reconstruction process and what are the perspectives for the people and government of Nicaragua.*

Marengo: We are living through a fascinating process of social change in our so meagerly developed country, with our extremely dependent economy and with the very specific characteristics we inherited from the Somoza system in terms of the destruction of our productive capacity. The final offensive of the war against Somoza coincided with our planting season, causing grave effects on our harvest and resulting in an extreme diminution in our ability to earn foreign exchange from our exports, which are basically agricultural.

On the other hand, we inherited a country which had been completely sacked by the dictatorship, since all the credits obtained in the recent period were embezzled by the tyrant, his family and cohorts.

In this light, our main problem now is financial. The country's foreign debt is enormous, about \$1.6 billion. Of this, \$600 million was contracted as short-term loans at commercial interest rates by the Nicaraguan private banks. All these loans come due this year.

We believe that our strategic objective, the most important task we now face, is to get past this public debt bottleneck in order to get the reconstruction process into high gear and normalize our economic life.