

“ . . . Nationalism is inevitable as a principal driving force in new nations. Current nationalism differs sharply from the older imperialist nationalism of earlier in the century . . . ”

ASIAN NATIONALISM: THREE CASE STUDIES *

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I

Some reflections on the role of Mid-20th Century Nationalism

THE TRAGEDY of World War II is, in a large measure, the consequence of a rampant and virulent nationalist imperialism in Germany, Italy and Japan.

Towards the end of World War II the attitude of the community of nations towards nationalism was personified in the UNESCO concept—that of (a) the universality of human culture; (b) that science knows no boundaries; (c) the notion of policing national systems of education for evidences of hates and prejudices. All these are heavily anti-nationalist and pro-internationalist concepts.

The immediate post-war era was marked by self-repudiation of imperialism on the part of the great powers and orderly movement toward self-government for the remaining colonial areas.

Self-government speedily led to independence, with India and Pakistan leading the parade in 1947. Ceylon achieved its independence in 1948. Movement became an avalanche, aided by the realities of the world-wide population explosion, and the revolution of rising expectations. From some 50 nations in the original UN, the sovereign powers in the organization now total 114.

Nationalist movement after World War II was characterized by:

(a) A shift from an imperialist-nationalism to a psychological and sociological nationalism—a search for identity, a demand for acceptability, and insistence upon equality.

(b) An intensive economic nationalism, well intentioned, of course, but which could become counter productive when, for example, industrialization is forced upon certain less sophisticated economies.

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(c) Paradoxically, the new nationalism is producing literally scores of new nations, each attempting to constitute a viable economic complex, at exactly the time in history when the established and developed powers plainly recognize they cannot, in and of themselves, survive as non-interdependent economic and social entities. About as much reason is afforded for Gabon to be an independent and sovereign power as for the island of Samar!

Post-war nationalism in many cases is also characterized by unfortunate excesses. Sometimes the drive toward a national identity has led to intolerance of other identities, thus the emergence in some new nations of the most severe minority problems in modern history. Moreover, such problems have tended to be of greatest intensity in states where nationalism is of the greatest intensity—for example, the Jews in Egypt, the Muslims in India, and the Chinese in some countries of Southeast Asia.

Nationalism in some cases also tended to particularize cultural values and to equate these with national history at the expense of the history of man. Also visible in nationalist efforts is a tendency “to prove themselves” *vis-a-vis* the more developed societies—to discount, to reject, and even to discredit the political, social, intellectual and economic contributions of the West to any particular emerging country.

Conversely—in an age of technological breakthrough in electronics and aerospace, of revolution in communications and of invention and discovery on every hand—some new nations have employed a facade of dramatic modernism to advertise national progress with plush hotels, elaborate governmental TV networks, unprofitable national flag airlines and other expensive expressions of national pride. But often, these only conceal an unwillingness of nationalist leaders to come to grips with basic national economic and social problems.

Too often, also, nationalist leaders employ what amounts to demagoguery to keep aflame the national *spirit*. They indulge in rash promises, excite antagonism and weaken the concept of collective responsibility.

Finally, some forms of extreme contemporary nationalism, by favoring *national fronts* which discourage free political party activity, weaken democratic expression and sometimes unwittingly set the stage for communist penetration and take-over through state machinery which facilitates such take-over.

II

The Setting — Nationalism in Three Countries

IN INDIA, the society in which the phenomenon of nationalism developed was characterized by some 150 years of colonial rule by one coun-

try; a tradition of free expression and free institutions; both violent and non-violent manifestations of nationalist spirit. Also, the Indian experience reflected a substantial pre-colonial political history, a formidable intellectual tradition, a rich cultural heritage; and, the emergence of a towering nationalist leader—Mohandas Gandhi.

In Ceylon, the society in which the phenomenon developed was characterized by a similarly long period of colonial rule, but by three countries. Therefore, institutions and mores reflect Portuguese, Dutch and British influences—although the latter are by far the strongest. There was a similar history of free institutions and responsible government. There was no pronounced pre-independence nationalist movement, but a friendly and non-violent separation from the authority of the British crown. Political and social history was dominated by fear of India, accompanied by communal strife between Buddhist Sinhalese and Hindu Tamils. The cultural heritage was marked by the influence of Buddhism. Then there was also the obvious fact that Ceylon had no particular national hero.

In the Philippines, the society in which the phenomenon developed was characterized by the more than 300 years of Spanish authoritarian rule, followed by almost 50 years of liberal American administration. Then there was the passionate addiction to Western political and institutional forms in reaction to Spanish authoritarianism and in response to American administration. A nationalist revolution took place *before* the American occupation, the first such revolution in Asia and canalized into a long-term constructive force during the US occupation. The Philippines has a very complex anthropological history which produced a multi-ethnic society. Also, cultural history was greatly influenced by Catholicism. Its nationalist heroes lived, wrote and died during a revolution which preceded independence by several generations.

III

The Course of Post-Independence Nationalism

IN INDIA, initial reaction against foreigners was manifested in restrictions against investment, elevation of Hindi to be the national language, *Indianization* of business firms, and socialization of a significant segment of economic production. India adopted a non-involvement, non-alignment, neutralist foreign policy. She accepted economic assistance from both the United States and the Soviets. She retained Commonwealth ties and, internally, Western parliamentary, social and political institutions. It also tried revivification of the Indian cultural heritage, and an enormous effort to industrialize the nation.

Ceylon's initial nationalism was not anti-foreign, and it continued a government basically the same as before independence. It was oriented toward the Free World and tolerated foreign investment and business. Ceylon retained Commonwealth ties and, internally, Western parliamentary, social and political institutions. It worked toward reviving the Buddhist cultural heritage. However, there was no serious effort to industrialize. Additionally, in the mid-fifties a neutralist, ultra-nationalist group emerged.

In the Philippines, the initial desire to maintain political and economic ties with the United States was exemplified by military and trading arrangements concluded in 1947 and 1955. This meant the retention and vigorous expansion of a liberal Western political type of democracy. The initial series of governments were preoccupied with internal stability, e.g., the Huk rebellion, reconstruction, etc. There has also been a revivification of folk heritage. In the mid-fifties, a neutralist, ultra-nationalist group emerged.

IV

The Political Situation in Mid-1964

IN INDIA there has been an almost complete turnabout: India now welcomes foreign investment, is resigned to the continuation of English, and countenances the revival of British and other foreign interests.

The non-alignment policy of the mid-fifties has been shelved, particularly as a result of the Chinese Communist border incursions, with a concomitant increase in cooperation with the West.

There is now recognition of a continued need for massive assistance, e.g., one shipload of wheat each day from the U.S. indefinitely, in order to meet problems of population explosion and economic development. India also recognizes the need to intensify efforts to prevent or lessen outbreaks of communal disorder and it recognizes the interdependence of nations.

In Ceylon there was an ascendancy of the ultra-nationalists during the mid-fifties. They inaugurated detailed and far-reaching economic and social programs designed to deify nationalism, and to socialize the economy. They tended to discriminate against minorities. There was a significant deterioration in the economic situation, compounded by aroused feelings over expropriation without compensation of properties of foreign business.

Ceylon consciously drifted in its foreign policy orientation towards Communist China, and practically abandoned neutralism. There were

significant anti-democratic internal developments. These included arbitrary press laws, interference with personal liberties, and arbitrary expropriation of property.

The Philippines surmounted the period of anti-foreign, closed-society nationalist tendencies of the late fifties and continued pro-US policies, tempered by addition of pro-Asian orientation as well. The nation emerged as a new leader in Southeast Asia, with a conspicuous and phenomenal record of economic growth.

The Philippines recognized the need for re forging a permanent frame of economic and political reference, both with the United States—the Laurel-Langley Agreement ends in 1974—and with the rest of the world.

Conclusions

We conclude, therefore, that nationalism is inevitable as a principal driving force in new nations. Current nationalism differs sharply from the older imperialist-nationalism of earlier in the century. The transition in developing new relationships with former colonial powers is easier in those countries which accomplished their nationalist revolutions before or simultaneous with independence.

Nationalistic excesses can cause real setbacks to the orderly and democratic development of emerging nations.