

Turbulence of world scene underlines interdependence

by J.G.H. Halstead

The 1980s have started with a bang. The lengthy diplomatic hostage-taking incident in Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the unwelcome further increases of OPEC's oil prices are among the recent dramatic events which spell significant change in international relationships. We seem to be moving out of an era in which we perhaps took too much for granted and into a phase in which we can take very little for granted. We are entering a decade which gives every indication of posing some of the most serious challenges we in the industrialized democracies have ever faced.

Energy, as represented by the catch-word 'oil', has become the focus of global concerns in this last quarter of the 20th Century. Sharp, irregular oil price movements and major changes in the structure of the international oil market are playing havoc with rational economic planning and are having serious effects in terms of less growth, more inflation and higher interest rates. Moreover, oil is not the only finite resource which threatens to be in short and uncertain supply. There is every reason to fear an undignified and dangerous scramble for ever scarcer raw materials. The stockpiling of strategic goods has increased in all major western nations and measures have had to be taken to curb speculation in world markets for some valuable minerals.

The Third World countries are united in their search for national self-fulfilment and their demand for what they call "a more equitable world economic order". Understandably, their grievances are more often than not directed against the erstwhile colonial and mercantilist powers. They are united on little else, however, and the Non-Aligned movement, to which many of them look for refuge between the power blocs, is full of strains and contradictions. Moreover, the rush for industrial and technological progress in these countries has often been pressed with little regard for the resulting social tensions or for their capacity to absorb

the inflows of capital. Such countries often find themselves forced to reconcile conflicting value systems in an atmosphere of continual crisis. Small wonder that economic progress in many cases outstrips social change with violent results. If this is true in an oil-rich country like Iran, how much more so is it in the oil-poor countries, where stability will increasingly hinge on finding a solution to the energy problem.

Soviet aims

Recent events have also reminded us of the continuing threat to the independence and integrity of smaller states which is posed by the ruthless use of military power in the service of an expansionist ideology. The Soviet Union has been showing increasing boldness in pursuit of its aims as a superpower and as the self-proclaimed leader of the Communist world. In East Berlin in 1953, in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968 the Soviets demonstrated their determination to maintain their grip on Eastern Europe regardless of the views of the inhabitants. Elsewhere in the world they seemed content to rely on proxies and surrogates to take advantage of "national liberation movements" to expand their influence. In Indochina, Hanoi (with the aid of massive infusions of Soviet military equipment) completed its conquest of South Vietnam and embarked last year on the subjugation of neighbouring Cambodia. In Africa, Cuban legions bore the brunt of the fighting for pro-Soviet regimes in Ethiopia and Angola. In Afghanistan, however, the Soviets have made it clear that they are prepared to use direct intervention, if necessary, outside the Warsaw Pact area in support of their foreign policy objectives.

What are those objectives? For a recent answer we can turn to an election speech by Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko in February, in which he described the paramount factors in international affairs in the following terms: a strong cohesive 'socialist community' as its political and security base and rejects any shrinkage of that base. Once a country joins the community it must not be allowed to leave again. Secondly, Moscow seeks to exploit the indigenous nationalist movements in the Third World and to harness

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