

EXCURSUS 5

Jeremiah Novak on INTERDEPENDENCE & POWER POLITICS

The noble agenda of the 1970s that dealt with food, environment, population, disarmament, and the structure of the global economy seems so remote in 1981 that it is difficult to recall just where it got effaced.

Once again the globe is divided into two competing systems. Indeed, all the suspicions and fears of the original cold war are now in place, as if détente had never occurred. Events in Kampuchea, Angola, Ethiopia, Yemen, Iran, Afghanistan, and Iraq have highlighted the West's vulnerability to growing Soviet power. In the aftermath of the oil crisis the West discovered that Western Europe and Japan are totally dependent on Persian Gulf oil and that, should the oil fall into Soviet hands, the Western alliance—along with the current world political and economic order—would collapse.

In a sense the return of power politics should come as no surprise. Interdependence, whatever it means, has never included the concept of Western dependence upon Soviet or other radical regimes. The rhetoric of détente never should have been interpreted as a substitute for the balance of power, nor should it have been seen as a sign that "convergence" was at hand.

The new sense that superior power, not rationality, is at the helm of global politics is amply demonstrated by the gradual liquidation of the welfare state embarked upon in the U.S., France, Britain, and Scandinavia, and by the growth of military budgets, especially in the United States. The seriousness of these events has been made clear in a Council on Foreign Relations pamphlet—"Western Security: What has changed? What should be done?"—which implies a long-term build-up of Western forces, not only in the Indian Ocean but for deployment throughout the world. It includes the recommendation that questions of cold war strategy be injected into the annual economic summits and that questions of international economics be integrated into strategy.

A second, chilling report, written by Colin Gray of the Hudson Institute and printed in the summer, 1980, issue of *Foreign Policy*, calls for a new "offensive" nuclear strategy that gives the president the alternative "to initiate strategic nuclear use, for coercive, though politically defensive, purposes." What is a politically defensive purpose? In the event of war, Gray writes, "Washington should identify war aims that in the last resort would contemplate the destruction of Soviet political authority and the emergence of a post war world order compatible with Western values." Gray has linked the question of world order to nuclear strategy—*force*—and he clearly believes that the West can achieve a superiority such that the Soviets will either have to give in or lose a war. This approach is a far cry from the quest for world order of the '70s, which hoped through reason to allay the threat of war.

At the heart of the issue resides the question of whether the use of force is necessary or morally defensible in the creation of a new world order, or whether such a threat will result in another destructive war and a new world order based on power politics. Can any order so built ever eliminate the causes of war? Or are we condemned to accept power politics as the condition of "interdependence"?

Jeremiah Novak is a specialist in economic policy in the Third World.

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