

Bush takes revenge against Malaysia

by Lydia Cherry

The imperial Bush administration has gotten even with the outspoken prime minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, who has dared to raise questions about integral aspects of the Anglo-Americans' new world order. As a result of strong U.S. pressure, Japan has refused to join the East Asian Economic Caucus, an initiative which Dr. Mahathir has been organizing for since last December. It had been hoped that Japan would be a pillar of this grouping, which was envisioned to include the six countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, and Indonesia—as well as Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

Mahathir's plan was introduced in the wake of the Gulf war, with the Malaysian prime minister motivating the idea in Indonesia last March: "We see a situation today of a dramatic rise in the political, diplomatic, and military clout of the United States and a severe erosion in its economic position and welfare. We can expect the application of that enhanced political, diplomatic, and military clout to shore up the economic position and enhance the U.S. economic welfare. . . . Military adventures cannot be excluded."

Japan says 'no'

Japan's new foreign minister, Michio Watanabe, on Nov. 11 clarified any remaining questions about Japan's intentions, saying that his government is unlikely to join the EAEC as long as it excludes the United States. "The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum is a conference which includes even the United States, so it is worthwhile; but for my part, I can't go along with thinking which excludes a particular country." (The Malaysians perceive APEC as the strategy that the United States set in motion in the early 1990s to dominate the region.) Watanabe's comments were made two days after Japanese officials said that U.S. Secretary of State James Baker had sent a memorandum to Tokyo urging it to oppose the grouping, which the ASEAN nations have endorsed.

There had been some grounds for thinking that Japan might back Mahathir's proposal in spite of the United States, particularly once the leader most supportive of the plan, Kiichi Miyazawa, was elected prime minister. Miyazawa told the *Japan Times* early last June that Japan should take the lead in forming such a bloc, which would link ASEAN

with Japan and South Korea. Sources in Bangkok, however, say that in the last month, Japan was actively organizing against the EAEC.

Dr. Mahathir explained Nov. 10: "Based on our contacts with Japanese businessmen, Japan actually wants to join the EAEC but is being pressured from doing so by the United States." He added that Malaysia understands that Japan depends heavily on the U.S. for trading and for defense, and that his country appreciates the help Japan gives Malaysia on matters that are not objected to by the United States.

Mahathir: 'worried about the future'

Mahathir was understandably less charitable to George Bush, whom he blasted openly, reiterating his concerns about the danger of a one-superpower-world dominated by the United States. He also brought up the subject of the Gulf war: "During the Gulf [crisis], President Bush had contacted me and asked for Malaysia's support on its resolutions, and we supported them in the Security Council. But now this is the kind of gratitude we receive in return!" He referenced his speech to the United Nations, in which he had said that "if democracy is to be the only acceptable system of government within states, shouldn't there also be democracy between the states of the world?" Mahathir added that international democracy didn't exist, only the concept "might is right." Mahathir was asked what action Malaysia would now take against the United States. "What action can we take against a superpower. . . ?" he replied. "This is a sign that the freedom and independence of smaller countries will be eroded. I am now worried about the future, as we are not even allowed to call ourselves East Asians or to promote cooperation in the region." He made clear, however, that the economic collaboration initiative would continue to move forward "with our ASEAN friends," and with other nations in East Asia.

The Gulf war and the fact that predominantly Muslim Malaysia supported the U.N. resolution that gave the green light for the use of force against Iraq, is a sensitive subject in the country. Once the bombing of Iraq had begun in early February, Malaysia called for an end to it, rightly emphasizing that the destruction of Iraq had not been advocated by the resolution in question. "In the effort to get Iraq out of Kuwait we are not willing to see Iraq destroyed; this is our stand," Mahathir insisted.

During the Nov. 10-11 General Assembly of Malaysia's ruling Umno party, which Mahathir heads, the discussion of what a country like Malaysia can or cannot do in the unipolar world was discussed. Mahathir insisted that it was only because of the country's strong economic position that it had been able to speak out as strongly as it had. "After my speech in the United Nations recently, many developing countries said they agreed with everything voiced by me but they could not afford to air their views," because they have to plead for financial help from the West.