

'Delegates from 29 African and Asian Countries meet in Bandung', from Le Figaro (18 April 1955)

Caption: As the Bandung Conference opens on 18 April 1955, the French daily newspaper Le Figaro looks at the objectives of this Asian-African Conference and the policy of non-alignment.

Source: Le Figaro. dir. de publ. BRISSON, Pierre. 18.04.1955, n° 3300; 129e année. Paris: Le Figaro. "Les délégués de 29 pays d'Afrique et d'Asie réunis à Bandoung", auteur:Massip, Roger , p. 1; 14.

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Last updated: 01/03/2017

Delegates from 29 African and Asian Countries meet in Bandung

In his inaugural speech, President Sukarno condemned colonialism and bloc politics.

Representatives of 29 African and Asian countries met today in Bandung, an Indonesian city 200 km from Jakarta (formerly Batavia, Dutch East Indies).

Organised at the initiative of the member countries of the Colombo Group, the Conference will review and discuss issues of particular interest to the peoples of Africa and Asia, especially national sovereignty, racism and colonialism.

Each participating country is represented by either its Prime Minister or its Foreign Minister.

The published list of participants shows that, in geographical terms, the political ties and affiliations of the participating states are often quite varied. Turkey, an 'Atlantic' nation because of its NATO membership, rubs shoulders with Communist China; Ho Chi Minh's North Vietnam and Bao Dai's South Vietnam sit side by side; and neutralist India is in close proximity to US-influenced Pakistan.

However, geographical homogeneity has not been entirely respected: Israel has been excluded in response to demands from Arab League countries. And the two Koreas, Formosa and the Union of South Africa, will not be represented either in Bandung. It is clear that the convening powers had to resign themselves to some contradictions, but they sought to keep these to a minimum, for fear that the Conference as a whole would fail.

The issues to be dealt with in Bandung will, at all events, have to be tackled in general terms if the organisers want to keep up appearances and give the impression that a certain degree of solidarity and agreement has been achieved. That very same concern will no doubt mean that the debates will focus more on anti-colonialism than on neutrality. Although politically divided, the states represented in Bandung are, however, much closer in their desire to put an end to the domination of the white man.

Does this mean that the white nations will be in the dock? It looks certain that many acrimonious anti-colonial declarations will be heard. Some Arab states, including Libya, which claims to speak on behalf of the Tunisians, Algerians and Moroccans, will surely denounce France. Others will criticise the United Kingdom. In general, when the conference participants speak to the outside world, they will make a show of defying those countries that expect to continue their world domination despite the fact that they represent scarcely one fifth of the world's population.

These declarations should not be viewed as a disaster, although care must be taken not to dismiss them as one-off incidents.

They express a new desire for emancipation and independence and will vigorously confirm the discontent of one and a half billion people, most of whom live in difficult, if not miserable, conditions.

Above all, the Bandung Conference will assert the desire of the big Asian powers — China, India and Japan — to devise mechanisms for mutual assistance and the means for a better life in a world in which industrial might and access to raw materials are still the province of the big white nations, in particular the United States and the Soviet Union.

It will be interesting to observe Moscow's reaction to the large gathering in Bandung. Russia is part of the white man's world and will not have a larger representation at the Conference than the United States. Nevertheless, Russia intends to show that, to a large extent, it supports the anti-colonial stances taken by Africa and Asia. The Soviet Government's recent declaration, confirming its intention to refer the Middle East problem to the United Nations, is very significant in that regard. To understand the motive behind that manoeuvre, one need only look at the sections of the declaration where the USSR rails against the pressure that the US and the United Kingdom have applied to the Middle Eastern countries and proclaims its

determination to defend the freedom and independence of these nations by guaranteeing respect for the principle of non-interference in their internal affairs.

In short, the Soviet Government is seeking to remind the states meeting in Bandung that the Communists sympathise with them. And it is very likely that, by the same token, Moscow wanted to score points over Peking, because even before Premier Zhou Enlai had a chance to speak, Mr Molotov spoke in a manner identical to that of the man who was to represent the great Communist empire of Asia in Bandung.

Roger Massip