

'Bandung will bring out the best and the worst' from Le Populaire (19 April 1955)

Caption: On 19 April 1955, the French Socialist daily newspaper Le Populaire paints an optimistic picture of the work carried out at the Afro-Asian Conference held in Bandung from 18 to 24 April 1955.

Source: Le Populaire. 19.04.1955. Paris: Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO). "De Bandoung peuvent surgir le meilleur et le pire", auteur:Bidet, André.

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Bandung will bring out the best and the worst

In Bandung, Indonesia, a large Afro-Asian conference is about to open, a conference which has been planned down to the last detail for months. At a time when the interdependence of nations is asserting itself across continents, this is an event of global importance. It demands universal public attention.

The conference was thought up by the Indonesian Prime Minister, Ali Sastroamidjojo. He suggested the idea to his colleagues of what is known as the Colombo Group — Burma, Ceylon, Indonesia, the Republic of India, Pakistan — when they met in Colombo in April-May 1954. The project seemed an attractive one, but one which would be awkward to carry out because of the difficulty of finding a rallying-point. Nehru, a strong advocate of discussions which involve the whole of mankind, was able to overcome any hesitation. In late December 1954, in Bogor, he won everyone over. Soon after, the Colombo countries sent out their invitations. In so doing, they took a step which may well prove to be a milestone in world history.

Thirty Asian and African states are taking part in the Bandung Conference, represented there by Ministers. These Ministers speak and act in the name of 1 500 million Asians and Africans. The former constitute the vast majority. They are leading the way. It is a shame, therefore, that they have not suppressed opposition to the presence of Israel.

It seems obvious that a gathering of such a size will offer undeniable diversity. There are roughly three groups to be considered. The first of these unites the countries of the Colombo Group, although Pakistan and the Indian Union take different standpoints with regard to the Western and Eastern blocs. In theory, however, this group wishes to remain neutral vis-à-vis Moscow and Washington. Another group houses powerful allies of the Atlantic bloc, such as Turkey, Iran and Thailand. The final group includes countries which support the USSR, such as Communist China and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. This brief categorisation serves only as a pointer. The position of each State needs to be studied more closely. Where does Japan fit in, for example? Is not Ichiro Hatoyama, the Japanese Prime Minister, trying to implement a 'two-sided policy'? However that may be, he may well have to compete for influence on this point at Bandung.

The agenda of issues to be faced will certainly make this likely. The sphere of activity of the delegations is immense. The most important part of the task undertaken is 'to promote goodwill and cooperation between the nations of Asia and Africa, to discuss issues of particular interest to these peoples, those, for example, concerning national sovereignty, racism and colonialism', and 'to discuss the current position of Asia and Africa and how they can assist world peace and cooperation.'

In principle, the undertaking deserves approval. A successful outcome would earn its originators the gratitude of all mankind.

Without entering into the domain of prophesy, it seems possible to envisage that the Conference would at least want to propose a solution to three issues which are threatening to lead to war: Formosa, Korea and Vietnam. These are the subjects preoccupying the Asians. All three constitute dangerous disputes which must be resolved as a matter of urgency and by means other than force. There is no doubt that Bandung will lead to invitations to conclude peace agreements.

Another certainty is that colonialism will be condemned. Colonialism will attract unanimous disapproval. In a recent communiqué, the Burmese Prime Minister, U Nu, and Pham Van Dong, the Deputy Prime Minister of the 'Democratic Republic' of Vietnam, have already set the tone. They welcomed the fact that that the Bandung Conference will, for the first time, bring together the peoples of Asia and Africa, 'breaking through the barriers erected by colonialism'. And no doubt it will. In terms of colonialism, France will be in the hot seat when the North African situation is considered. It is not without good reason that Allal el Fassi (Morocco), Salah ben Youssef (Tunisia) and Hussein Ait Ahmed and Mohamed Yazid (Algeria) have been invited to attend the Conference as observers.

The presence of Abdel Nasser (Egypt) and of representatives of three countries of the Near and Middle East

indicates that discussion will focus on the issues concerning these two regions. This is where disputes may break out, if underlying antagonisms rise to the surface.

It would be unwise to underestimate the potential role of individual delegates. However, it is impossible not to imagine that three men — Nehru, Chou En-lai and Abdel Nasser — will dominate the debates.

[...]

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