

'A backdrop of anti-European sentiment', from Corriere della Sera (19 April 1955)


**Caption:** As the Bandung Conference opens on 18 April 1955, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera outlines the growing political awareness of the Asian-African peoples and highlights their various demands.

**Source:** Corriere della Sera. 19.04.1955, n° 92; anno 80. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Sfondo antieuropeo", auteur:Bartoli, Domenico , p. 1.

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## A backdrop of anti-European sentiment

From our correspondent

**London** 18 April, evening.

Buddhist monks, sheikhs in full regalia, austere Communist apparatchiks, diplomats skilled in the intricate subtleties of the East, bazaar orators, young officers who have seized power through coups d'état, elderly patriarchs, bona fide democrats and entrenched reactionaries are all among the hundreds of obscure and famous people who met today in Bandung, on the island of Java, for the most picturesque and bizarre conference in history. It is being called the Afro-Asian conference: not a single white man is there, as the Union of South Africa has been deliberately excluded and the Central African Federation including both Rhodesias and Nyasaland, set up recently under British impetus, did not want to take part. Negotiating international affairs at public conferences is a Western invention, for good or for ill. This is the first time that coloured people have used this method on such a grand scale.

Twenty-nine States are taking part: China, Japan, India, the Philippines, Indonesia, the four States of Indo-China, Siam, Burma, Ceylon, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Ethiopia, Liberia and the Gold Coast. In total, the delegates represent one thousand three hundred million people, most of whom are Asians (Africans accounting for just over fifty million). China and India stand out among the Asian countries, as together they represent nine hundred and fifty million people, followed by Japan, Indonesia and Pakistan. While delegations meeting in Bandung can speak for half of the human race, something that is making headline news in the papers even though the credentials of some of the delegates are rather questionable, these 29 States produce just 8 % of world revenue: 56 dollars per head of population, as against 1 800 dollars in the United States and 760 in Great Britain.

A more detailed look at this host of delegates highlights very striking differences and incongruities between the countries they represent. Austerely theocratic States such as the Arabian countries and remnants of a feudal past such as Nepal and Afghanistan contrast with countries like India and Burma that are successfully maintaining free institutions along British lines; military dictatorships such as Egypt are rubbing shoulders with Communist dictatorships, and countries in the grip of anarchy such as Indonesia are flanked by regimes such as Pakistan and Iran which, to avoid the same risk, are moving in the direction of an authoritarian government. These leaders draw their inspiration from Buddhism or Karl Marx, from Gandhi or the Koran, from pacifism or the glorification of violence, from imposed order or the most muddled demagoguery or from imitations of the House of Commons or of Kemal Ataturk or even Mussolini.

Over and above these models, most people's minds seem to be dominated by a confusion of ideas and sentiments, with the exception of a few, among whom the Communists are undoubtedly the strongest. We read that the Indonesian Government has accommodated its guests in the villas that line the sides of an extinct volcano close to the graceful town of Bandung. The blind violence of a volcano in continuous eruption would be more in keeping with the circumstances of most of these people.

The stances of these 29 States on world policy are no less complex. We all know which side China is on, together with its North Vietnam satellite, and we also know that India is decidedly neutral, along with Burma and Indonesia. On the other hand, 15 or so of the countries taking part have some kind of military link with the United States or Britain or with both. Some of the most forward bases of the American and British armed forces are in the territory of these countries. Links with the West are not, however, very stable: they are being weakened not just by domestic instability, Communist infiltration and the appeal of Indian non-alignment but also by nationalistic aspirations.

These 29 States therefore have very different aims and policies, and the issues on the agenda for today's inaugural session are striking in their generality. The delegations are set to discuss economic and cultural cooperation, human rights and the fate of peoples under subjugation. Only when tackling this latter issue will the delegates be able to agree on a concrete approach. Everyone hates colonialism equally because

everyone has suffered in some way from its hardships (and forgotten its benefits), although China is obviously unable to support the view expressed today by the Iraqi delegate and shared by others, i.e. that the new colonialism of the Communists is no less dangerous than the imperialism of old.

Extremely poisonous arrows are being fired from all sides against surviving imperialism: against French policy in North Africa, against hard-line Boer racism in South Africa, against the Portuguese in Goa, against the Dutch in New Guinea and even against the British, whose popularity has improved somewhat following their unconditional and orderly withdrawal from their Asian empire, for their repression in Malaya. This was foreseen in the invitation that India and the other four host powers sent out last December.

Against this backdrop of anti-European sentiment, the two figures of the Communist Chou En-lai and the neutralist Nehru stand out because of the size of their countries and their personal influence. Chou En-lai will try to make the very most of this picturesque meeting. Nothing would please China, as well as Russia, more than to channel this anti-colonialist hatred against the only nation of European origin that has never been a colonialist, the United States. Even the mighty America could not in the long term withstand the joint impact of the two main revolutions of our time: that of Communism and that of coloured people. Bandung offers an opportunity to try to lay the foundations for a universal alliance between both.

Although the time may not yet have come for such an alliance, China will perhaps manage to widen its infiltration and derive propaganda advantages from this major conference. As an immediate goal, it is looking for support for its claim to Formosa and the coastal islands and is trying to isolate the United States from those Asian peoples who are not yet committed to either bloc. For these reasons, China is supporting the principles of mutual non-interference and peaceful coexistence, together with India and Burma. China cultivates neutralism when it is unable to obtain or impose active cooperation with its anti-American campaigns. Asian neutralism, however, bears the name of Nehru.

On his arrival in Bandung, the Indian Prime Minister ruled out any discussion of controversial topics (alluding primarily to Formosa) and in so doing prudently anticipated the general topics of today's agenda. He has been playing a very oriental game with Chou En-lai for some time: Nehru is trying to moderate Chinese expansion by taking the Peking Government at its word as regards its famous principles of non-interference, and Chou En-lai is trying to neutralise as many Asian countries as possible in order to remove them from western influence, while trying to keep his hands free. This is a game that seems set to continue. India may well see China arrive at its eastern borders, very powerful and ready for new conquests. If, however, China violates its commitments in Indo-China or attacks Siam or Burma, it may well see the whole of Asia that is still independent rise up behind America.

Bandung is an episode in this subtle diplomatic skirmish between the two Asians. Unfortunately, American mistakes, more in words than in deeds up to now, ambiguous attitudes to the coastal islands and the lack of attention that has been paid to propaganda among the Asian masses, have forced Nehru even further into his non-aligned stance, masking the decisive strategic fact that it is only the might of the United States that is protecting the free Asian countries from Communism. Indian non-alignment, more than direct Communist influence, may increase its standing and its sway over the conference that opened today.

Domenico Bartoli