

Note from the Commonwealth Relations Office on the holding of an Afro-Asian Conference (18 November 1954)

Caption: In a note dated 18 November 1954, George Crombie from the Commonwealth Relations Office expresses his concern at the holding of an Afro-Asian Conference, particularly since anti-colonialist views will undoubtedly dominate discussions. He also fears the potential participation of the British colonies.

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URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/note_from_the_commonwealth_relations_office_on_the_holding_of_an_afro_asian_conference_18_november_1954-en-28ed9770-3abf-4aaf-a343-875c230f95ef.html

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Proposed Afro-Asian Conference

A factual note showing how far this has got is attached.

2. From the United Kingdom point of view there are two main objections to this Conference:-

- (i) the only topic on which the Conference is likely to agree will be anti-colonialism;
- (ii) we should be faced with awkward constitutional difficulties if, as seems almost inevitable, the sponsors try to arrange for some of our Colonies in Africa to be represented at the Conference by "observers". (It would be equally difficult for us if individuals are invited direct or if, as is probably unlikely, the invitations are addressed to the Governor concerned or to the United Kingdom Government.)

3. As regards (i) all five Colombo Powers including India, Pakistan and Ceylon are committed to attend this Conference and will probably be represented by their Prime Ministers. They all hold anti-colonial views and any direct attempt to divert them from discussing anti-colonialism would not only be unsuccessful but might even encourage them to be more anti-colonial than ever. Anti-colonialism is such an obsession with, for example, Nehru, that it might even be unwise to approach him with counsels of moderation, but Sir John Kotelawala is in a somewhat different category and the Secretary of State may perhaps decide to have a talk with him about the subject of colonialism at the Afro-Asian Conference. If so, it is suggested that he might take the line that as the Ceylon Prime Minister is aware, our Colonial policy is to foster self-government by stages
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through democratic forms; that there is ample evidence of the manner and speed with which this policy is being put into effect; that the subject is already being adequately discussed in the United Nations; and that discussion at the Afro-Asian Conference in the absence of representatives of the administering powers may not in fact contribute to the orderly transition of dependent peoples to self-government which the sponsors of the Conference desire. Since such discussion cannot apparently be avoided, then at least it should be conducted as moderately as possible and not allowed to degenerate into a mere display of anti-Western and anti-European feeling on racial lines which would play into the hands of the extremists and the Communists. The Secretary of State might also mention in particular that we should greatly deprecate invitations being sent to any of our Colonies in Africa which would place us in a most embarrassing position and he might express the hope that Sir John Kotelawala would oppose any such proposal when he attends the preliminary meeting of the Colombo Powers at Djakarta at the end of next month. The Secretary of State might also point out to Sir John Kotelawala our objections to the proposal now under consideration to invite Communist China to attend the Conference; this would indeed seem to us to be contrary to the policy of non-alignment which some of the Colombo Powers have adopted and the Chinese would be certain to use the occasion for propaganda against the West.

4. If the Secretary of State decides to speak to Sir John Kotelawala on this subject, we could use the record of his discussion as a basis for a telegram of guidance to our High Commissioners at Delhi, Karachi and Colombo and also to the Government of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The Foreign Office have

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already sent a telegram to some of their posts, copies of which have been sent by the Colonial Office to the Governments of Colonial Territories in Africa (~~2282A~~ in ~~CHC 82573~~ attached). But the C.R.O. posts will have to be treated somewhat differently.

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G. E. Crombie
18. 11. 54.

44 Australia House - memo

45 memo by Sir S. Ganes CRO - 22.11.54