

**CHRONICLE***"Masquerade" in Cairo.*

In future surveys of the wreckage of the white imperialist era, the attitude adopted toward December's Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Conference should rank high on the list of great white clangers. When the first conference of imperialist victims met at Bandung, Western governments did their utmost, through their valets and mercenaries in the area and their own "observers," to join the party and divert attention from the common enemy. Since Bandung was on government level, they could do no less. The Cairo conference was not on government level and by definition could not be, including as it did countries still under colonial rule with those which have shaken it off. Also included were delegations from China (headed by Science Academy president Kuo Mo-jo) and the U.S.S.R. (leaders from all its Asian republics).

Western propagandists approached the problem with disastrous irresolution and lack of co-ordination. First they tried the blackout treatment — and so effectively that an Egyptian nationalist, returning on my London-Cairo plane from some months in the U.S.A., had never heard of the conference which was to begin next day. British colonial authorities put a ban on travel to Cairo, thereby only intensifying anti-imperialist feeling. (Most of the colonies were there to report on their bitter ordeal and struggle — in some cases represented by people who were already outside their countries). Where persuasion was the only available weapon, Western efforts toward a boycott by "respectable" Afro-Asian elements likewise boomeranged.

In the event, comparatively conservative opinion was represented in such delegations as the Ethiopian, Tunisian, Moroccan, Ghanaian, Burmese, Thai, Kuwaiti and Libyan — and the Egyptian itself. The largest delegations after Egypt's, and among the most politically varied, were from Japan and Iraq. Distinguished delegates included several members of the exiled government of Jordan; an ex-Prime Minister, three senators and the Ba'ath Socialist party leader from Syria; Yemen's vice-minister of foreign affairs; former ministers and M.P.'s from Iraq; the Interior, Foreign and Commerce ministers from Sudan; four M.P.'s (two Congress Party) from India, three from Malaya and one from Burma; four M.P.'s, three ex-ministers or vice-ministers and some industrialists from Japan; and from Lebanon six M.P.'s, a former Prime Minister and a former Speaker of the House. Leaders of present resistance movements and, no doubt, of future governments were spokesman for countries under white alien subjection.

Such a gathering of nations long divided-and-ruled by the free world could hardly, without loss of dignity, be treated as if it wasn't there, even though they had made their arrangements without asking white permission. The historic oppressors of these dark multitudes shifted the line to denunciation of all participants as tools of Muscovite atheists, with reminders of the West's own "spiritual values." As the con-

ference got under way the Dally Telegraph detected "frenzied hatred" and "diplomatic blackmail" at work. The New York Times, seeing a "vast network of subversion," called the conference "slapstick" and placed "Afro-Asian," "peoples" and "imperialism" fairly within quotes.

But London's Times, after shrugging off the gathering as an "Asian solidarity" masquerade, returned as it often will to reflecting a more sober view. In a long editorial it counselled caution in treating "anti-western opinion as if it were thereby pro-Communist." No matter who "dominated," the conference did "hold up a mirror to western failings." The next we knew was that Dulles was flying to the Baghdad Pact conference in January -- with power (which he did not use) "to match or top the Russian economic carrot," as the New York Herald Tribune described Soviet offers of non-military, non-political aid to participating countries at Cairo.

The convenience for the U.S.S.R. of being partly Asian, and its interest in winning support among colonial or recently colonial countries, are obvious. But if many came to Cairo with some suspicions about the Soviet role — and they probably did — few could seriously criticise the Soviet performance there. The delegates represented peoples for whom imperialism is a grim reality, determined to end it in all its manifestations, quick to recognize imperialist behaviour towards themselves through any smokescreen of anti-imperialist words. With virtual unanimity the conference welcomed the Soviet Santa Claus as non-imperialistic. Here, for whatever motives, was an advanced country offering aid not as a member of a political, ideological or military bloc, and not to perpetuate inequalities but to correct them through industrialization. The recent record indicated that such offers from the U.S.S.R. were more than words.

I heard one Burmese criticise the Russians and Chinese for throwing their weight around, but they were generally complimented for "staying well in the background." A conservative Malayan M.P. worried about the "communist danger" at home, said British friends had tried to discourage 'his coming to a conference "merely aimed to mobilize Africa against so-called colonialism." He had replied: "Are you suggesting there is no colonialism, in Africa?" and packed his bag for Cairo "because I am not going to be dominated by anybody."

But it was not to hear what the Russians had to say that some 550 delegates came from some 50 countries. (Since delegations delayed by West-imposed curtains were still arriving, the exact count was uncertain when I left; a recent report from China gives it as 52). The main question was what countries held back by imperialism could do to help each other win freedom, make it stick and enjoy its fruits. One thing the Afro-Asian majority of mankind hoped to do together, said Egypt's Anwar El Sadat, was "to make war impossible" — to see that decisions for peace or war were no longer made "in certain European capitals." There was no voice to dispute the view that the Baghdad and S.E.A.T.O. pacts, like N.A.T.O., were aggressive and already moribund.

From start to finish, peace without quotes was coupled as the keynote with an end to imperialism without quotes. Asians, as Indian M.P. Anup Singh pointed out, were the first atomic victims and Afro-Asia had the greatest need of atomic "miracles" for peace. If the West continued its war preparations, it must further tighten its grip on colonial and semi-independent countries which provide bases and raw materials. While five countries had become independent since Bandung, the Port Said aggression had "brought home to us that the imperialists are not fully reconciled to our freedom and are ever ready to pounce back on their old victims." No Afro-Asian country's independence was assured so long as the West fought against it in Algeria and Morocco, the Cameroons and the Congo, West Irian and Madagascar, Kenya and Aden, Cyprus and Goa and elsewhere. "White minorities must be prepared to live with indigenous populations on the basis of equality, not as alien taskmasters" - and if that was "anti-Western," then let the West make the most of it. As for the alleged "power vacuum" in the Middle East, "if there is any vacuum it is in the hearts of the architects of these doctrines" such as the Eisenhower Doctrine.

A turbaned, bearded Yemeni delegate greeting the conference "in the name of God" said: "They are trying to kill the baby (Afro-Asian unity) before it is born, but it has been born and is growing stronger." A young delegate from Somalia seemed to speak for the majority when he said to me:

"We are used to being called communists because we want independence, although in our country — as in so many others represented here - there is no Communist party. Can they not understand that we are all for some kind of socialism? Don't they know that this cannot be resisted, and that capitalism is not at all popular now?" I murmured that I thought they knew it quite well but were too frightened to admit this simple and obvious truth even to themselves.

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What were the achievements of the conference? So far as the British press was concerned, virtually zero. Not one correspondent was sent from London. The resolutions - all adopted unanimously after days of eloquence and compromise in the commissions — went almost unreported in major newspapers, entirely so in the *New Statesman* and *Tribune*. It is anybody's guess how far this is due to anti-communist hysteria spreading infection far into "left" circles, and its resulting illusions; and how far to traditional Anglo-Saxon arrogance as to the capacity of lesser breeds to achieve anything for themselves. Yet if the word "historic" still has any meaning, it is surely appropriate to the first meeting between newly-independent and still-struggling subject peoples at the height of the crisis of the West.

Perhaps the deepest and most lasting significance of Cairo was the opportunity it gave to leaders of these peoples to get to know each other informally; to compare notes on the various techniques of imperialism around the globe and how to defeat them. Thus, on a two-continent-wide scale eclipsing what was possible at Bandung, was

ended the long night of isolation for fighters against a single enemy. Strong friendships were made, and across many oceans, deserts and plains they will not be broken.

In a "Message to the People of the World" the conference reaffirmed the Bandung principles of human rights and justice, sovereign equality of all nations, mutual co-operation, non-interference and peaceful settlement of disputes. To follow up on this and the long, detailed resolutions calling for action, an Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Council was created in Cairo, with a permanent secretariat (Cameroons, China, Ghana, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Sudan, Syria, U.S.S.R.) under an Egyptian secretary-general. Egypt started the fund for its operation with an annual pledge of £10,000. At its first meeting the A.A.P.S.C. secretariat set dates in March for a bi-continental "Ban Nuclear Weapons Day" and an "Algeria Day" supporting that country's liberation forces. The resolution on Algeria described France's war as one of attempted genocide, and urged Africans and whites in the French army to "refuse to fight their brothers."

A massive cultural resolution proposed lowering of travel and cultural exchange barriers throughout the area, mutual aid for higher studies, an international Afro-Asian university, and joint bodies to de-imperialise school textbooks, stimulate inter-Afro-Asian translations and prepare an Afro-Asian encyclopedia. A "social developments" resolution urged swift, radical changes in women's, children's and old people's welfare legislation and asserted the individual's "inalienable right" to "social, educational and housing services" and to medical care. An economic resolution, declaring nationalisation a "lawful means and right" of any sovereign nation, specified ways to broaden trade among Afro-Asian countries "irrespective of social-economic systems." It proposed conferences of their trade union, chamber of commerce, agricultural and co-operative organisations. It denounced the European Common Market but a proposal for an Afro-Asian Common Market was withdrawn. The conference endorsed the struggles of "the Arab peoples for unity and freedom from foreign influence" and condemned "any foreign interference which endangers peace," citing the Baghdad Pact and Eisenhower Doctrine. Tunisia's delegation wanted the Doctrine deleted but bowed to overwhelming sentiment for keeping it in.

On the question of race discrimination, some delegates spoke bitterly about the situation in the U.S.A. but the conference preferred the positive line of the Sudanese delegate who said that all governments except one (South Africa) were "determined to resolve the problem." The resolution on the Arab-Israel dispute was comparatively moderate under the circumstances: it "adopted" a report on the Arab refugee situation and oppression of Arabs in Israel, supported the Arabs' general "rights in Palestine" and to return there, and declared Israel a "base of imperialism" threatening security in the region. Israel had forfeited all delegations' sympathy by attacking a neighbour in concert with Western forces and allying itself with the slaughterers of the Arabs'

brothers in Algeria. Even Mrs. Rameshwari Nehru of India, a potent spokesman for non-violence and compromise, referred on the first day to " the recent aggressive attack made on your (Egypt's) independence by three Western imperialist powers."

The concrete results of the conference will be seen as time goes by and the A.A.P.S.C. is submitted to the test of action. The expected increase of trade among Afro-Asian countries, which possesses two-thirds of the world's population and most of its wealth, may produce interesting changes in the world economic picture. By re-enforcing the Bandung "bonds between these countries Cairo may help shift the power balance decisively in the U.N. in the direction of peace by negotiation. Western reactions to the conference drew Afro-Asian attention more sharply than ever to the hypocrisy and absurdity of " communist " charges from that quarter.

The general effect may be not to deepen the rift between the " colonial " and " imperialist " worlds but, eventually, to bring them closer on a basis of equality. Coming immediately after the Paris N.A.T.O. conference, to which it was in some ways a devastating reply, it has emphasised the overlapping fates of the Bandung-Cairo nations and the Western peoples with " their " bases in the Middle and Far East. In Britain the flights overhead of H-bomb-carrying planes had become the issue of the hour. In Cairo -we were reminded of the same danger threatening the Middle East. One delegate reported that, a few nervous nights after the Suez attack, 1,000 U.S. planes took the air from Turkish and neighbouring bases, ready to "deliver" atomic annihilation within an hour or two as a result of radar blips from a flock of geese flying south . . . .

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