

File Away Bandung

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In April 1955 a conference was held in Bandung, Indonesia, and attended by the first post-colonial generation of Afro-Asian leaders. Arrayed before the world for the first time were those politicians who were to form the foundations of the Third World Pantheon. In all there were 28 states represented along with some of the emerging national liberation movements. There was Sukarno, the host from Indonesia; Nehru of India and Mohammed Ali of Pakistan, leaders of the countries formed after the British withdrawal from the Indian sub-continent; Chou-En-lai, a prominent member of the Communist party of the most highly populated country in the world; Nkrumah, the self-proclaimed conscience of Africa, soon to be President of Ghana; Gamal Abdul Nasser, the future hero of Suez; and there were many others. These men, unsullied by colonialism would be at the head of a new wave of mankind. "This is the human race speaking", enthused the black American writer Richard Wright, an observer at the conference. More than thirty years later, it is appropriate to ask how it all went wrong.

Citizen Sukarno meets the 'Redeemer'

The cult of personality, a sure sign of political failure was already presaged at Bandung. Sukarno opened the conference with an epic of phrase mongering obscurantism. "We, the people of Asia and Africa ... are far more than half the human population of the world, we can mobilise what I have called the Moral Violence of Nations in favour of peace." Sukarno's subsequent rule of Indonesia can be called government by acronym. He coined Nekolim, which was Neo-colonialism, Colonialism and Imperialism. Nasakom (Nasionalisme, Agama {religion} and Komnisme) was the name he attached to the cabinet. The Romans gave their crowds bread and circuses: Sukarno fed them with words. Tired of party government, he devised and implemented Demokrasi Terpimpin which meant 'guided democracy' (guided by Sukarno of course). Sometimes

he lapsed into sentences. "President Sukarno has called on Citizen Sukarno to form a government", was a typical conceit.

Eventually Sukarno ran out of words, organised a putsch from power (this, a bizarre and essentially Sukarnoesque twist) and had to watch his supporters being massacred in a counter-putsch from the army.

Kwarne Nkrumah was Africa's answer to Sukarno. After Bandung he began to allow himself to be known as the 'Redeemer'. In 1961 he seemed to be intent on emulating the old Japanese emperors by becoming God. "All Africans know that I represent Africa and that I speak in her name. Therefore, no African can have an opinion that differs from mine." By this time the Ghana Civil Service accounted for 61% of all employment in that country. In 1977 Ghana railways had a staff of 17,000 but not one extra mile of track had been laid since independence. Corruption was rife. One Henry K. Djoba, charged with fraud on an agricultural matter, gave Nkrumah a Mercedes Benz sports car, a bullet-proof Mercedes 600, a sailing boat and £25,000 in cash. Nkrumah sent him to jail anyway. Someone wisecracked that you could not buy an African politician, you could only hire him for the afternoon. Nkrumah took all those measures which prevent an opposition expressing itself democratically. As a consequence, the opposition expressed itself undemocratically and got rid of him in 1966 by military coup.

30 Years of Planning Chaos

It is only superficially correct to say that the people at Bandung and their successors rejected the European experience. They rejected capitalism which had been damned by being part and parcel of the colonial period. They wholeheartedly embraced however, the post-war Western belief in socialist planning and the necessity for a powerful state. Without the tradition of respect for individual rights built up over time in the West, this led Third World countries to economic failure and political tragedy. They also borrowed from Western academia the habit of using words like

'elitist' and 'imperialist' in a very loose sense. Thus, an advertisement for coca-cola would be defined as 'imperialist' and a sign of domination by the US. The development of the idea that economic influence from the rich West was to be avoided has led to the curtailing of trade and the hindering of capital movement, both extremely damaging to the prospects of Third World countries. The backdrop of a run-down street with posters of the dictator of the moment pasted on the billboards was only part of George Orwell's imagination. It has become the reality in all too many countries in Africa and Asia.

The main response to failure has been to fall back on ever more recondite theories blaming the economic stagnation of some countries on neo-colonialism, multi-nationals etc. It has almost gone unnoticed that other countries have developed very rapidly since 1955. Japan, represented at Bandung, is overtaking most of its European and American competitors. Other countries in the Pacific Basin, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore have positively thrived on trade with the West and think nothing of inviting multi-nationals to their shores. And Hong Kong's example is all the more impressive when it is remembered that it still labours under the British imperial yoke.

'A Situation of Anomalous Development'

Professor Mazrui, whose television programme on Africa appeared recently on the BBC typifies those people whose soul and emotions still hunger for the Bandung solution. To him, economic success fails like the rain. In his Reith Lectures (1979) he stated that as a result of the industrial revolution, "economic pre-eminence was *bestowed* upon the countries of Europe and North America." (My Italics). He is puzzled by the idea of poverty amongst plenty. Africa "itself seems to be endowed with resources, but a disproportionate number of people in the continent is undernourished and underprivileged. A situation where a continent is well endowed but the people are poor is a situation of anomalous development". But this is an anomaly only to those with no sense of history. Before the

invention of agriculture *Homo sapiens* was, in Mazrui's terms, in poverty amongst plenty. History tells us that it is quite common for societies to become economically wealthy even though they may have negligible natural resources. Venice, Holland and Japan were not conspicuously endowed with natural resources. The key to economic and political success is the institutions which exist in society. Wealth creation only takes place in those societies which possess a suitable framework of individual property rights. Without these rights possession of natural resources is worthless.

Economic development should be easier for the countries of the Third World than it was for Britain at the end of the 18th century. The developing nations have the knowledge of the early pioneers at their disposal. Instead of forcing hundreds of thousands of people into collectivised villages as Nyerere did in Tanzania or persecuting the most productive people as has happened in Vietnam, it would be simpler to follow the example of the Japanese by purchasing patent rights and allow the citizens of Third World countries to manufacture the goods at lower labour costs than in the West. The West can make a major contribution by dismantling barriers to Third World exports. There should be no levies on the import of textiles and the absurdly damaging Common Agricultural Policy of the European Community should be ended thereby allowing Third World exports to reach the West. Such measures would no doubt have been insufficiently grandiose for a Sukarno or a Nkrumah, but they are the only ones which will bring lasting benefits.

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