

New Moves in S. E. Asia

THE meeting held the other day near Jakarta—the meeting of five Asian Prime Ministers—which decided to convene a conference next April of no fewer than 25 Asian and African countries, from Afghanistan to the Gold Coast, from Libya to Japan, and including Communist China . . . by any standard is a portentous event. The first thing to note about it is that it's to be a conference of non-white countries, including, in China and India, two of the most populous countries in the world. The second, which may be fortuitous, but is certainly interesting to us in New Zealand, is that it's to be held in Indonesia, which is the nearest neighbour of Australia. The third point is that the five Prime Ministers called on the Netherlands to re-open negotiations with Indonesia on West New Guinea.

This matter . . . came before the United Nations in mid-December, when a resolution calling for the re-opening of negotiations failed to secure a two-thirds majority. The resolution was strongly opposed by Australia, also by New Zealand. It was supported by Asian countries and the Communist bloc. The United States abstained. Soon after the decision, President Soekarno, of Indonesia, said his country must rely on her-

Extracts from a recent commentary on the international news, broadcast from the main National Stations of the NZBS

self and not on the United Nations to regain West New Guinea. So we have this meeting of Asian Prime Ministers intervening in a matter on which the United Nations, after a full debate, had refused to intervene. This matter concerns us, because Australia has declared, in effect, that the security of Australia and New Guinea are one and indivisible.

I do not think that this question of West New Guinea is likely to come to a head quickly, but I do think it is significant that Indonesia, having failed in the United Nations, has in effect turned to another international grouping, which may or may not prove to be powerful—and we certainly won't be able to disregard it. It would be equally easy to make too much of the decision to hold this conference and to make too little of it. Obviously a conference of 25 very diverse countries, if they all accept invitations, isn't going to be easy to control. It won't find it easy to reach any but the most general conclusions. There will probably be as many divisions among them as there would be among 25 white countries large and small. But it is a challenging thought, and to many a disquieting thought, that

the composition of this novel and important international conference has been decided on the basis of colour and of race.

Some of those attending it will be members of the United Nations, some also members of the Commonwealth, one was also an observer at the SEATO conference. One will be a Communist country, some will be strong opponents of Communism, some feel themselves under threat of Communist aggression. It is, as I say, easy to point out this diversity and the difficulties to which that will lead. But the important thing about it, surely, is that the convening of such a conference serves notice on the rest of the world, most of which is white, that there is a special point of view, a special interest, which is not represented, or not adequately represented, in the United Nations or any other assembly, and that this . . . is going to be asserted. This is a manifestation, the most striking to date, of that long-talked-of upsurge of the coloured races.

The obvious danger, of course, is that the expression of the special point of view of those

countries will be distorted by the presence and the strong influence of Communist China. Whether this is allowed to happen will depend, I suggest, more upon Mr. Nehru than on any other nation's representative. Whatever the outcome of the conference, we in New Zealand would do well to seek to understand it and the motives which inspire it, and to attempt to gauge its strength and the direction it may take. I hope that New Zealand will seek to have observers there. It seems to me essential that in all matters affecting us in the Pacific, New Zealand should have its own eyes and ears. However much we may respect the judgment of others . . . we should have our own sources of information. Nobody should urge that these would be superfluous. There is too much at stake.

For this reason it is good news that our new Minister of External Affairs, Mr. Macdonald, is to go to Bangkok. But there is need also, I suggest, for continuous New Zealand representation in the area. The difficulties which will confront the SEATO partners have not become



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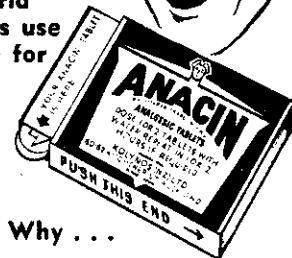
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