

Two Continents Stand Up (April 17, 1955)

Abstract

Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the People's Republic of China, was a key organizer of the Bandung Conference (in addition to Indonesia's president Sukarno and India's Prime Minister Jawarhalal Nehru). Though China was still aligned with the USSR at the time, Mao was convinced that the anti-colonial nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiments that were rising in Africa and Asia might lead to a movement that China could position itself as the head of. In his mind, he was the natural choice to be the leader of such a global movement, as he had led an anti-colonial nationalist revolution in China. The Bandung Conference was the launching point for China positioning itself as the leader of the emergent "Third World"; their conciliatory and reasonable position throughout the conference, and their insistence on neutrality, were key to achieving their aims of international leadership. One can already see this emerging dynamic in this article from *Neues Deutschland*, the SED paper; the article quotes the "great statesman" Mao, who compares India's "fate in the past and its way to the future" to China's "destiny and path," positioning China as the natural spiritual leader for the "Third World."

Source

The Asian-African Conference in Bandung Begins on Monday

For seven days, the Indonesian city of Bandung on the island of Java will witness an event of world-historical significance: the Asian-African Conference. Government delegations from 29 countries on two continents will discuss issues vital for their peoples: measures against military threats and colonial terror, raising the standard of living, cooperation on the basis of peaceful coexistence. Nearly 1.5 million people stand behind these delegations, more than half of the world's population. There has never been such a conference in the history of humanity. The mere fact that it has been convened demonstrates that the days of the unrestricted rule of the imperialist thieves in Asia and Africa are gone forever. The Bandung Conference will be an anti-imperialist one. It will be a conference not just of governments, but above all of peoples. It will provide new and powerful forces to the international movement against war and for peace and friendship among nations.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

The participation of the People's Republic of China is of signal importance for the Bandung Conference. The great 600-million-strong people of the Far East has transformed its once half-colonial land into a united, free and democratic state stepping surefootedly along the socialist path. Together with the Soviet Union, the People's Republic today stands at the head of the international camp of socialism and democracy. The liberation of the Chinese people from foreign oppression and its rise to happiness and prosperity is a revolutionary model for the peoples of Asia and Africa who are still living under the conditions of colonial rule. In the People's Republic of China and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which will represent the world socialist camp in Bandung, the peoples of two continents see pathbreakers on the road to freedom.

The participation of the People's Republic of China — and not Chiang Kai-Shek's clique — also leaves no room for doubt that the majority of humanity regards the government in Peking as the true representative of the 600 million Chinese. When Indian Prime Minister Nehru was asked why Formosa (Taiwan) was not included among the participants in Bandung He answered: "I know of no such state."

And there is no doubt that, as in Geneva, the delegation of the People's Republic of China under the leadership of Prime Minister Chou En-lai will add its weighty word for peace in Bandung in the name of its people.

COLOMBO STATES

This word will also find an echo among the representatives of countries that are still at different stages of societal development and economically, socially and politically wholly disparate from China. They include above all countries like India, Indonesia and Burma, which, colonized until quite recently, are now sovereign states pursuing an independent foreign policy on many issues, one dedicated to safeguarding the peace and solidifying their autonomy. These states also convened the Asian-African Conference in December 1954.

The international authority of the Republic of India in particular is constantly growing. "The Indian people," the great statesman of the new China Mao Tse-tung once noted, "is one of the great peoples of Asia with a history stretching back thousands of years and a gigantic population. The country's fate in the past and its way to the future are in many respects similar to the destiny and the path of China." And Indian Prime Minister Nehru remarked during his stay in China: "In some respects our problems are the same, and the conditions under which we are working are also similar. For that reason, we have much to learn from one another."

Taking the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence as the basis of their relations, the People's Republic of China and India, which together count nearly a billion people, gave the peoples of Asia, Africa and the entire world an example of the peaceful coexistence of states with differing political and societal systems. Since then, a whole series of other countries have joined these Five Principles in word and deed. All of these countries are continuing their struggle to shake off the last imperialist shackles. Throughout Asia, a "collective security zone" is being formed, which is increasingly shaping the political face of the largest of the five continents.

MIDDLE EAST

Egypt, the leading nation in the Middle East, recently also pledged itself to peaceful coexistence, indicating the advent of a new development in this area as well. Thus far, the national liberation movements in the Arab countries have not yet attained the strength and scope that they have in a number of Asian states. The imperialist powers, attracted by the great riches (especially petroleum) and the strategic location of this region for their aggressive plans, are seeking by every means to integrate the Arab states into the Baghdad Pact and transform them into pliant instruments of their policies. But here, too, the imperialist plans are built on sand. After Iraq's betrayal of the states of the Middle East, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Yemen have already formed a new anti-imperialist coalition. The Arab peoples' fight for independence is growing apace and increasingly merging with the great Asian-African peace movement.

AFRICA

Egypt is also an African country. Alongside Egypt, representatives of other parts of the "Black Continent" will also be present at such a conference for the first time in Bandung. Not so long ago, the imperialists regarded Africa as their limitless colonial playground, and the oppressed Africans responded only with individual, spontaneous protest actions.

This changed, however, after the victory of the Soviet Union in the Second World War and the Chinese People's Revolution. The general upswing in the anti-imperialist liberation movement also gripped the peoples of Africa. The subjugated peoples are awakening more and more to autonomous political life. Their national liberation struggle has taken on an unusual strength and scope and the most varied forms.

It is led everywhere by the young African proletariat and their democratic organizations, above all the trade unions.

In contrast to Asia, however, Africa is still essentially a colonial continent. Only a few countries have managed thus far to attain political sovereignty. For that reason, only a few African states are officially represented in Bandung, some of which are still subject to imperialist influences. These include Liberia, Libya and Ethiopia. Just as the Asian delegates will raise their voices for the people of Malaya, who are fighting bravely for freedom and independence, though, the African delegates will also represent the interests of patriots in Kenya, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, the interests of the miners of Central Africa, who emerged victorious from great political strike actions, and whose colonial government was the only one to reject the invitation to Bandung, and the interests of the population of South Africa, which is exposed to fascist racial terror.

All of this helps to explain why the imperialists of all countries are so very worried about the Asian African Conference and have sought from the beginning to sabotage it. Some time ago, the *New York Herald Tribune* wrote that the Americans should be under no illusion; in Bandung, the USA and its allies would not be the judges, but the accused.

The first American attempts to break up the Bandung Conference by encouraging individual states under US influence not to attend failed. The peoples forced their countries to accept the invitation. Since then, with the help of their satellites, the US imperialists have been using every available means to torpedo from within the discussions in Bandung, from which they are excluded. States like Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines, Turkey and others have already received precise instructions on how to prevent the conference's success. But these countries are in the minority in Bandung. Their governments are faced not just with the majority of conference participants, but also with pressure from their own populations, who honestly desire peaceful coexistence. Even Japan, a loyal US vassal until the toppling of Yoshida, is a very uncertain factor in America's plans for Bandung.

That is why the US is not stopping at influencing individual delegations. While tossing out lures of increased financial "aid", it is also resorting to open terror, inciting the fascist parties and organizations in the host country Indonesia against their government and not hesitating to take drastic actions. The malicious and cowardly murder of members of the Chinese delegation and progressive journalists, who met their death in an airplane crash caused by agents of the US and Chiang Kai-shek, reflects all the corruption and vileness of the imperialist system. But this murder will backfire on the murderers. The peoples are stronger.

For decades, the imperialists built their colonial system on a policy of dividing the Asian and African peoples in order to subjugate them individually. Today, the peoples of Asia and Africa have taken to heart the experiences of the past. Today, they form a united peace bloc from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the Gold Coast to the Amur River.

Source of original German text: Horst Leinkauf, "Zwei Kontinente stehen auf: Am Montag beginnt die Asiatisch-Afrikanische Konferenz in Bandung," *Neues Deutschland*, no. 89, April 17, 1955, p. 6.

Translation: Pam Selwyn

Recommended Citation: Two Continents Stand Up (April 17, 1955), published in: German History in Documents and Images,
<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:document-5227>> [July 03, 2025].