

The Asian Socialist Conference in 1953 as precursor to the Bandung Conference in 1955

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Although the Bandung Conference is well known and well documented, there has been little research done on how the conference came into being. The Asian socialist movements that flourished in the years between 1947 and 1955, had a formative influence on the Bandung Conference in 1955.¹ This is demonstrated by a study of the Asian Socialist Conference (ASC), a Party-level Conference, convened in Burma in 1953. The nature of contacts between members of the international socialist movement in Asia was based on the triangular relationship between India, Burma and Indonesia, a relationship in which Japan had a supplementary role. The cordial relations among the three countries developed out of their struggles for independence. Based on these contacts, the Social Democrats from the four countries agreed at the beginning of 1950s to refrain from joining either of the two power-blocs of the Cold War. Thus, the Asian Socialist Conference emerged as an effort to link up to like-minded parties in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. The Burma Socialist Party (BSP), in conjunction with the other Asian Socialist Parties, played an influential role in establishing the Asian Socialist movements, and thus ultimately the Non-Aligned Movement. Although there has been some study of the relations between Communist Parties in the Third World, much less is known about the role of Socialist Parties.

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stance part of the party's policy in 1946, during the national struggle for freedom.⁹ The Colombo meeting that preceded the ASC was similar in this respect to the Bogor meeting preceding the Bandung conference, since both were initiated through linkages between socialist parties. The ASC in 1953, brought together Socialists from nine countries of Asia¹⁰, with fraternal delegates from the Socialist International¹¹, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia¹², the International Union of Socialist Youth¹³, the Congress of Peoples against Imperialism¹⁴ and representatives of the African freedom movements from Tunisia, Algeria, Kenya, Nepali and Uganda.¹⁵ The significant feature for the initiation of the 1955 Asia-Africa Conference was the participations of delegates from Africa as Observers, even though the ASC of 1953 was initially devoted to Asian problems. The African delegates could speak out on behalf of their peoples under the agenda of "Freedom Movements in Colonies", and this led to further relations between the movements between 1953 and 1955.

At the Party-level Conference in 1953, the main players were: from the Burma Socialist Party (BSP) U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein; from the Partai Socialist Indonesia, Dr. Sjahrir and Mr. Soebadio Sastrosatomo; from the Praja Socialist Party of India, Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan, Dr. R. Lohia and Mr. Asoka Mehta; from Socialist Party of Israel (Mapai), Mr. Moshe Sharett; the Social Democratic Party of Japan, Mr. Mosaburo Suzuki (Left) and Mr. Komakichi Matsuo (Right); from Pakistan, Mr. Mubarak Saghu; and

⁹ *The Socialist Front Weekly Journal, Vol:II, No.1, dated on 27.2.1946*, pp.6-7: The BSP urged to the national front, AFPFL, to hold the Asian Colonial Conference.

¹⁰ These nine countries were Burma, Indonesia, India, Israel, Japan, Lebanon, Malaya, Pakistan and Egypt.

¹¹ The delegates from Socialist International were Mr. Clement Attlee from British Labour Party, Mr. Andre Bidet from French Socialist Party, Mr. Kaj Bjork from Swedish Socialist Party and Mr. Saul Rose from the British Labour Party.

¹² The delegates from Communist Party of Yugoslavia were Mr. Djilas Milovan, Mr. Alles Bebler and Mr. Blazovic Anotelko.

¹³ The delegates from the International Union of Socialist Youth were Mr. Donald Chelsworth and Mr. William Worthy.

¹⁴ The delegate from the Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism was Miss Margaret Pope.

¹⁵ From Algeria—Mr. Said Farni; from Kenya—Mr. I. K. Musazi; from the Nepali Congress—Mr. B.P. Koirala, Mr. Subaran Syumsher, Mr. Upadhyay and Mr. Krishna Prasad, from Tunisia—Mr. Tayeb Slim and; from Uganda—Mr. E. N. K. Mulira. *Report of The First Asian Socialist Conference, Rangoon, 1953*, Rangoon: An Asian Socialist Publication, 1953, p.ii, pp.111-112.

from the Socialist Party of Egypt, Mr. Ahmed Hussein. On the other hand, 29 countries¹⁶ including the 5 sponsoring countries, participated in the Governmental Level Conference in 1955 at Bandung, in which the 10 most distinguished leaders¹⁷ were from Indonesia, India, Burma, Ceylon, the People's Republic of China, Egypt, Jordan, the Philippines and Pakistan. Two members of the Burma Socialist Party were also included in the Burmese delegation at Bandung.¹⁸ Comparing the two Conferences in 1953 and 1955, the weakness of the second one was that it had excluded any delegates from Israel and thus, discussions of the problems of Arab-Israeli relations could not lead to any resolution of the problems. Nevertheless, the overwhelming difference in the case of Bandung was the attendance of the delegates from People's Republic of China.

The key determinations of the 1953 Conference were concerned not only with Asia (Malaya) but also Africa (Uganda, Kenya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco). These were all presented as resolutions within the framework of "Freedom Movements In Colonies". The resolutions should be seen as early steps in addressing the "Problems of Dependent Peoples" in the Bandung Conference in 1955.¹⁹ The Asian Socialists' put forward resolutions in the 1953 Conference on the problems of human rights in colonies as part of

¹⁶ Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, People's Republic of China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gold Coast, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, Democratic Republic of Vietnam, State of Vietnam, Yemen.

¹⁷ President Sukarno from Indonesia, Prime Minister Shri Jawaharlal Nehru from India, Prime Minister U Nu from Burma, Prime Minister Sir John Kotelawala from Ceylon, Premier Chou En-lai from People's Republic of China, Prime Minister Lieutenant- Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser from Egypt, Foreign Minister Wahid Salah from Jordan, Minister General Romulo from Philippines, Prime Minister Mohammed Ali from Pakistan and Prime Minister Ali Sastroamidjojo from Indonesia.

¹⁸ Minister U Tun Win and Ambassador Thado Thiri Thudhamma U Hla Maung (Ambassador to China) who played in BSP as Presidium Member *Collected Documents From the Asian-African Conference: April 18-24, 1955*, Jakarta: The Department of Foreign Affairs (Indonesia), 1983, pp.196-197: the delegates from Burma were U Nu (PM), Duwa Zau Lawn (Minister for State), U Zahre Lian (Minister for Chin Affairs), U Raschid (Minister for Trade Development and Labour), U Tun Win (Minister for Information), Maha Thray Sithu James Barrington (Ambassador in Washington), Thado Thiri Thudhamma U Hla Maung (Ambassador to China), Myint Thein (Judge, Supreme Court), U Mya Thein (Charge d'Affairs in Jakarta), U Ohn Sein (Member of Parliament), Thun Thin (Director of Central Statistical and Economic Departments) and U Aye Hlaing (Lecturer in Economics at the University of Rangoon). I would like to thank Roland Burke, University of Melbourne, who gave me this document.

¹⁹ *Report of the First Asian Socialist Conference, Rangoon, 1953*, Rangoon: An Asian Socialist Publication, 1953, pp.55-57, pp.106-108: Appendices B (7), B (8), B (9), B (10) and B (11).

an agenda of attaining freedom.²⁰ Thus as a consequence of these debates the socialist movement requested that an Asian-African Conference be held.²¹

The other major links between the ASC and Asian African Conference (AAC) were in the fields of economic cooperation and anti-imperialism. In the holding of the first Bureau meeting of the 1953 ASC, Asian Socialists had decided to set up the Economic and Colonial Bureaus. These later developed into the sections of the Bandung Conference on "Economic Cooperation" and "Problems of Dependent Peoples".²² At their second Bureau meeting, they set up a Committee of Economic experts and an "Anti-Colonial Bureau", the most active body in ASC, to extend more active help to the nationalist movements in Africa.²³ There was also a suggestion that the Anti-Colonial Bureau have African representatives as members.²⁴ Thus there were resolutions of the Bureaus (1) Encouraging the holding of an all-Africa Congress and (2) Requesting that newspapers in Asian countries devote more space to Asian-African colonial questions, and support the demands of the freedom movements editorially.²⁵

The third Bureau meeting set up a program for the Anti-Colonial Bureau which included (1) Studying the situation of existing colonial territories and satellite countries, (2) Approaching freedom movements everywhere through regular correspondence, (3) Encouraging, guiding and helping the freedom movements to speed the attainment of independence according to Socialist lines as adopted by the Rangoon Conference, (4) Maintaining regular information on development of freedoms all over the world, (5) Making contact with the Asians, particularly Indians, in Africa for the purpose of bringing about better relations between them and the Africans, (6) Requesting member

²⁰ Ibid., pp.106-108.

²¹ Ibid., pp.53-62.

²² *Asian Socialist Conference: Minutes of Bureau Meetings held during the period, 1953-1956: Minutes of the 1st Meeting of the Bureau held at Rangoon on January 15, 1953*, p.3.

²³ *Asian Socialist Conference: The Minutes of The 2nd Bureau Meeting, August 10th to 13th, 1953 at Hyderabad, in India, Annex-II*, p.2: "The Secretariat Report of The 2nd Bureau Meeting".

²⁴ *Asian Socialist Conference: Secretariat-Report to the 3rd Meeting of the Bureau*, p.9: the inclusion of delegates from Nigeria and Morocco- Dr. Azikiwi and Allal El Fazzi.

²⁵ *Asian Socialist Conference: The Minutes of The 2nd Bureau Meeting, August 10th to 13th, 1953 at Hyderabad, in India, Annex-VI: "Anti-Colonial Bureau"*; See also in Saul Rose, *Socialism In Southern Asia*, London: Oxford University Press, 1959, p.240.

Parties of the Asian Socialist Conference to arrange for a year's stay of at least one African in their respective country, and providing opportunities to study Trade Union, Cooperative, Youth and Peasant Organisations and the Socialist movement in general, (7) Requesting Governments in Asia to grant scholarships to African students to enable them to carry out their studies at various universities and schools in Asian countries.²⁶

The final similarity is in relation to the determinations on "World Peace" at both conferences, which involved approaching the United Nations on disarmament, prohibition of the production, experimentation, maintenance and use of Atomic weapons, and the statement that Atomic energy should only be utilized for peaceful purposes.²⁷

To summarise the links, the 1953 Conference had the following features in common with the Bandung Conference: (1) the "Economic and Colonial Bureau" of 1953 which was in line with the 1955 determination to solve "Problems of Dependent Peoples" through "Economic Cooperation"; (2) the idea of construction a friendship bridge in political and educational areas between Africa and Asia came out of the program for the Anti-Colonial Bureau set up by the ASC Third Bureau meeting, and was along the lines of the program for "Cultural Cooperation" proposed at Bandung.²⁸ The two conferences made similar resolutions on issues of Human Rights; e.g., the "Declaration on Colonialism" by the Anti-Colonial Bureau at the ASC third Bureau meeting, which was similar to the resolution on "Human Rights and Self Determination" in the Bandung Communiqué.²⁹

The determinations of the ASC of 1953, led to the following actions: the Asian Socialists and African delegates addressed set of practical problems both in Asia and in Africa.

²⁶ *Final Communiqué' of the Asian-African Conference Held at Bandaung from 18th to 24th April, 1955*, pp.4-5: in which, "the Conference recommended that countries in Asia and Africa which are more fortunately placed in this respect should give facilities for the admission of students and trainees from such countries to their institutions".

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.19-20; *Final Communiqué' of the Asian-African Conference*, pp. 7-8: the Conference also announced officially the disarmament and the prohibition of the production, experimentation and use of nuclear weapons and declared that "universal disarmament is an absolute necessity for the preservation of peace" and appealed to the United Nations to prevent it.

²⁸ *Asian Socialist Conference: Minutes of Bureau Meetings held during the period, 1953-1956: Minutes of the Bureau Meeting held at Kalaw (Burma) from May 25 to 28, 1954*, p.15.

²⁹ *Asian Socialist Conference: Minutes of Bureau Meetings held during the period, 1953-1956: Minutes of the Bureau Meeting held at Kalaw (Burma) from May 25 to 28, 1954*, pp.16-17.

These practical issues were addressed amongst other things by: (1) research that provided data on the political situations of colonial possessions in Africa³⁰; (2) the grouping of Asian and African countries at the United Nations³¹; and (3) the announcement in a press statement by the ASC in February 1955 to support the freedom struggles in North Africa, specifically in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. This last statement was also included in the legal announcement of AAC in April, 1955.³² Another significant implementation by the ASC can be seen in a map, included in an "Information Bulletin", the printed "Socialist Asia" in 1954, arranged by Information Bureau, drawing attention to Asia and Africa.³³ The ASC led to joint Asian and African approaches in the United Nations Organisations concerned with world peace. This was also one of the official announcements at Bandung Conference.

The ASC delegates were optimistic that they could include the PRC in a governmental level conference, which was the case in Bandung. Thus the ASC led to fruitful approaches to the PRC government. Included in these approaches were attempts to find a peaceful solution to the Formosa question, and the ASC led to private discussions on this issue. Thailand and the Philippines had right-wing governments at that time, and so remained outside any attempts to create a Socialist bloc, however the inclusive approach of the ASC led to these countries' participation in the Bandung Conference.

Thus the 1953 ASC, in terms of achievements and effect on world politics, was an event of great political significant not only to the region but also to the whole world, and deserves to be recognized as on the same level as the Bandung Conference of 1955. In some ways the ASC achieved things that the Bandung Conference could not. This was particularly the case with the exclusion of Israel at the Bandung, meaning that the Arab-Israeli conflicts were not addressed in final communiqué of the Bandung Conference.³⁴

³⁰ *Asian Socialist Conference: Anti-Colonial Bureau-News Letter No. 3, dated August 1954*, p.4.

³¹ *Asian Socialist Conference: Anti-Colonial Bureau-News Letter No.6, dated February 1955*, pp.3-5: "The Problems Of The Colonial Peoples: Excerpts from U Hla Aung's speech to a New York Gathering".

³² *Ibid.*, p.1; *Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference*, p.7.

³³ *Socialist Asia, Vol.III, No.2, June 1954*, Rangoon: Burmese Advertising Press, 1954, pp. the map between 15 and 17. (Note. It was published by U Hla Aung, for Asian Socialist Conference, 4, Wingaba Road, Rangoon.)

³⁴ *Asian Socialist Conference: News Letter, No.1, dated on May 24, 1955*, pp.1-3.

was unprincipled and thus, it was unfortunate to discuss the Israel-Arab problem. In more general terms the declaration on colonialism coming out of Bandung was not as clear on African issues and did not concentrate emphatically on immediate actions, meaning that the practical outcomes of the ASC were greater than Bandung's.

In conclusion, the ASC and the two years of actions that followed it provided a very clear vision of what would happen at the Bandung Conference in 1955. The ASC had its roots in the common struggle for independence in South Asia, Burma and Indonesia, but extended its determinations to include Africa. The ASC's creation of linkages between countries, in particular its practical resolutions for Asian and African countries to act together in the United Nations, means that it played a very important role in the genesis of the Bandung Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement. Thus the ASC should be regarded as part of a movement that transformed the shape of international relations, building on the initial triangular relationship to create an Asia-Africa bloc, that was christened the Third World.

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ချစ်မေနှစ်သင်္ဂါ(ဇီဝု)၊ "အမျိုးသားအဖေနှင့်ခေါင်းဆောင်ကြီးသင်္ဂါ(ဝ)ကြိမ်ကုန်၊ မိသားစုဝေဖန်ချိမ်းမိ(Chit Maung, Thakin (Waidura), National Leader Azarni Thakin Mya, First Edition, Rangoon: Meettharsu Literature Press, 1979.)

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သန်းကို၊ (ကြွေးမင်တို)၊ "မန်မာအင်ဒိုနီးရှားနယ်ချဲ့ဆန့်ကျင်ရေး သွေးစဉ်းဦးဆောင်မှု"၊ မိုးပွင့်စာပေ၊ ဇန်နဝါရီလ၊ ၁၉၉၆၊ (Than, Ko (Kyimyindine), "The Unity of Myanmar-Indonesia for Anti-Imperialist": *Moe Journal*, January, 1996.)

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၁၉၉၆၊ (Than, Ko (Kyimyindine), "The Unity of Myanmar-Indonesia for Anti-Imperialism": *Moe Journal*, March 1996.)

ဆိုရှယ်လစ်တပ်ဦးရွှေနယ်၊ အတွဲ (၂)၊ အမှတ် (၉)၊ ၂၇၀၁၂၀၁၁၉၉၆၊ (*The Socialist Front Weekly Journal*, Vol:II, No.1, dated 27.2.1946)