

'The partition of India' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (14 June 1947)

Caption: On 14 June 1947, the German daily newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung considers the implications of India's political independence and expresses fears of future violence between the Hindu and Muslim communities following the partition of India and Pakistan.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. Friedmann, Werner; Goldschagg, Edmund; Schöningh, Dr. Franz Joseph; Schwingenstein, August. 14.06.1947. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Indiens Teilung", auteur:WS , p. 1.

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The partition of India

What is taking place at the present time is surely the most significant event in recent English history, but it is, in fact, too much overshadowed by other events on the international political stage for the European observer to catch sight of it. This event is the partitioning of British India, something that may well lead to its departure from the British Commonwealth of nations. When Lord Mountbatten succeeded Lord Wavell as the Viceroy of India in late February, he was aware that the tasks that he faced in that office would be completely different from the problems that had occupied his lengthy chain of predecessors since the creation of the office of Viceroy by Lord Canning in 1858. It is for Lord Mountbatten now to draw a line under one and a half centuries of British rule in India, and the most important issue of all here is the manner in which he will perform this most painful of operations for Britain — for it is in India that the splendour and power of the Empire has been embodied, like nowhere else in the entire world.

Britain is now fulfilling the promise that it had made in 1942 at the height of the war and is granting India independence. This means that the people of India will enjoy complete self-determination with regard to the future of their country. The most difficult part of this procedure is to discover what is the true will of the Indian people, since this is a country with a population of 400 million, one fifth of the total population of the earth, who are divided into innumerable castes, political factions and religious groups, among whom there has never yet been any kind of agreement whatsoever. Great Britain, which, during the period of its rule, managed to bring the plurality of India into a unified whole and so make the country into a significant factor in the world economy, is determined to leave behind a legacy of as great a degree of political order as possible. The scale of this task is underlined by the bitter internal struggles among the Indians themselves — there have not been any more large-scale rebellions against the British since the 1857 uprising. These internal conflicts took place in 1942 and again, in particular, after the war — right under the nose of the British Administration. Among the Indians, it has always been the Hindus and their Congress Party who are in favour of a single administration for an independent India; the Moslems, on the other hand, organised in the Moslem League under the leadership of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, are set to make a stand against a central government, since their numerical strength is only about one third of that of the Hindus, and they fear that, with a proportionally lower level of representation, they would be outvoted in the administration and their rights would be curtailed.

Two weeks ago, the Viceroy returned to India from his consultations with the British Government and held round-table talks in New Delhi, the seat of the provisional government of India, with the leaders of the political groups. He made a renewed attempt to persuade the Indians to seek a single constitution and administration for their country, but rejection by Jinnah caused this attempt to fail. This led Lord Mountbatten to put forward the new proposals from London that take account of the demands of the Moslems and accept the partition of the country. Hindus and Moslems are to be given two completely independent states in Hindustan and Pakistan, and these states would be given the choice as to whether they wished to sever all ties with Britain or remain as a Dominion within the loose-knit framework of the British Commonwealth of Nations. The leaders of the parties have agreed to the plan for partition, although they all expressed certain reservations, and made it known that they regard this partitioning as anything but ideal and as being far from the solution to all the internal problems in India. The consent of Jinnah has been approved by the Council of the Moslem League, and the Hindu Congress Party is to take a decision on the British proposals in the next 24 hours.

Lord Mountbatten is already in consultation about the practical implementation of the partition and the ultimate transfer of sovereign rights to the Indians. This is something that the British now want to bring about as soon as possible, although, only a short time ago, London had set June 1948 as the final date for withdrawal. As a result of the irreconcilable differences within the Indian nation — the religious hatred and the social class divisions into castes are almost incomprehensible for Europeans — partition will be an extremely difficult task that Britain intends to hand over to the Indians themselves. It will not be possible to determine the boundaries of Pakistan and Hindustan without compromises on issues concerning territory. The main problem of Hindus versus Moslems is compounded above all by the question of the independent principalities and also by the Sikhs, the third-largest group in the Indian nation. Our map shows the rough outlines of the most important areas of the Hindus and the Moslems, which will make up the two new states.

The territories ruled by the princes are to remain independent within the framework of the newly created countries.

American observers fear that the struggle between the various groups in India will not be ended by partition but will now be continued with even greater bitterness. These critics are thinking in particular of the aggressive nature of the Moslems, who are likely not to be satisfied with Pakistan in the form that is now being created and who can count on strong support from outside for this view. Leader writers in the international press are posing the question as to how far the country will shift away from the sphere of British influence into that of other powers, once there has been a transfer of power to the Indians. It was during the Second World War that the USA came into closer contact with India for the first time, and, since then, it has maintained economic links. Britain had assigned India the role of a supplier of cotton, jute, rice and tea as part of its Imperial economy, and, by not seriously supporting industrialisation, had maintained the country as a market for the sale of British industrial products. If the future states of India wish to secure economic as well as political independence, there will have to be an initiative for strong industrial development. In all probability, this will result in closer cooperation with the United States, and that could also lead to closer political ties. It may be expected that Pakistan will forge links with the Moslem states in the Middle East, something also suggested by the latest reports from Reuters suggesting that the Moslems in the Middle East are now pursuing policies directed towards the goal of a federation, to which all the Moslem states in the world would belong.