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The India League

Anticolonialism and the End of Empire 1916-1948

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Abstract

This thesis recovers the history of the India League by exploring its mobilisational methods, solidarities, arguments and the historical contributions of an Indian anticolonial transnational organisation headquartered in the imperial metropole. It explores the India League's anticolonialism as a network which inverted the hierarchies of power within the British empire by connecting Indian anticolonialism with the British Labour movement, the House of Commons and certain sections of the left-wing elites that came to hold power in postwar Britain. The League's anticolonialism also exceeded itself in terms of both membership and ideology as it included a great many Britons and global anticolonial, antiracist, antifascist and progressive allies, forming a politics with global – even universal – horizons. Through this network the India League transmitted a dissenting version of empire: anticolonialism as a form of knowledge-production. Its location in Britain also enabled the mobilisation of the British Indian diaspora in the negotiation of anticolonial Indian identities and the conquest of political space. This insisted upon the compatibility of the categories of 'modern' and 'Indian' which were held apart by the ideologies of imperialism. Most importantly, this thesis argues that the India League contributed to the achievement of Indian independence by successfully disseminating its anticolonial idea of a Constituent Assembly for India until it became the very policy by which Labour sought to achieve Indian independence. The summoning of an Assembly, however, also contributed to Partition. This was a rough road to midnight as the India League faced opposition from Viceroy, Conservatives, the police and the India League's shadowy nemesis: Indian Political Intelligence, a secret arm of the *Raj* working to destroy Indian anticolonialism in Britain, and throughout the world.

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Introduction

As Indian independence became a near-certainty, the India League received a ‘portrait in oils of the late Dadabhai Naoroji, “father” of the Indian National Congress, as a gift from members of his family’ which was to hang ‘in the offices of the League at 165 Strand WC2.’¹ It is almost certain that this gift was in recognition of the fact that the India League had come closest to fulfilling Naoroji’s political programme. Naoroji had sailed to Britain in 1886, despairing at the prospect of wresting political concessions from the colonial Government in India which was, as his recent biographer puts it, ‘the preserve of some of the most reactionary and racist Anglo-Indians’ forming a bureaucracy that ‘saw no need to reform its authoritarian ways’ and ‘brooked no opposition.’² As Joya Chatterji has noted, given the severe restrictions on political and press freedom enforced by that authoritarian bureaucracy, not to mention the difficulties of presenting a united opposition to the *Raj* in face of the very real social and political divisions in the vast subcontinent, it was unsurprising that Indian anticolonialists should set their sights on the imperial metropole.³ There, they sought to influence government and the public, often from the progressive end of British politics. Naoroji, for example, sat as a Liberal MP for Finsbury and forged an alliance with Henry Hyndman and the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), one of Britain’s earliest left-wing organisations. Over the years, many more Indian anticolonial activists, including Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal and, later, Jawaharlal Nehru would spend a part of their careers in Britain, often seeking to escape the harassment of the colonial state or political strife within India.⁴ Others would make an entire career out of campaigning in Britain, such as the Communist and Labour MP, Shapurji Saklatvala.⁵ This was not confined to individuals: One

¹ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report (Hereafter: ENSYR), 13.3.1946, British Library/India Office Records/L/PJ/12/456 (hereafter: BL/ IOR).

² Dinyar Patel, *Naoroji: Pioneer of Indian Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 88.

³ Joya Chatterji, *Shadows at Noon: The South Asian Twentieth Century* (London: The Bodley Head, 2023), 4.

⁴ See Nicholas Owen, ‘The Soft Heart of the British Empire: Indian Radicals in Edwardian London’, *Past & Present* 220 (2013), 143-184.

⁵ Marc Wadsworth, *Comrade Sak: A Political Biography* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2020).

of the earliest expressions of Indian anticolonialism was the London India Association, formed in 1865 with Naoroji as ‘the vigorous spirit behind it.’⁶ This was followed by the British Committee of the Indian National Congress (BCINC) and, later, various Indian organisations in Britain, of which the most influential was the India League. Like Naoroji, the India League’s political purpose was to escape colonial authoritarianism and utilise Britain’s liberal freedoms to articulate anticolonial arguments at the ‘soft heart’ of empire. Like Naoroji, the India League’s arguments were intended to prove one thing to the British: that their empire in India was profoundly ‘un-British:’ economically exploitative, politically authoritarian and violent.

The principal argument of this thesis is that the India League’s long Naorojian campaign was substantially successful. This is advanced in two ways. The first is by assessing the reach of the India League’s transnational anticolonial network and its resulting ability to influence the policy direction of the British Empire through connections with key sections of the Labour leadership, as well as its ability to bring pressure through the wider Party. The more decisive component of the argument traces the India League’s transmission of a radical anticolonial idea through that network – a Constituent Assembly for India – until it became a key demand of both Congress and a widening section of the British Labour Party. It also became the subject of secret agreement between Nehru and the Labour leadership (including Clement Attlee and Sir Stafford Cripps) in 1938. This agreement then became the basis of an initiative led by Cripps, with some support from Attlee, culminating in a Constituent Assembly being offered by the abortive 1942 Cripps Mission, before becoming the very policy by which Labour sought to accomplish Indian independence after 1945. Thus, the India League influenced the Labour Party to take a bold and distinctive approach towards India, a route that would not have been taken by the Churchillian Conservatives, the Viceroy or the India

⁶ Joya Chatterji, *Shadows*, 4.

Office, allowing us to measure the League's contribution to both the form and timing of Indian independence. This is not to rob agency from the increasingly mass anticolonial struggle in India, far from it. The India League could only help Labour answer questions posed by Congress about Indian self-determination. A reckoning between Congress and British rule was certainly coming but had Churchill won the 1945 election in Britain, that reckoning would have been very different. As such, examining the India League can solve a few puzzles within the wider history of Indian independence: why the most advanced of Congress's demands, a Constituent Assembly, conceded by the Cripps Mission, which was dispatched by a government led by a notorious diehard? Why did postwar Britain switch from the conference method at Simla (called by Churchill) to Labour's experiment with a Constituent Assembly, unprecedented in the empire? Why was Labour in such a hurry?

Examining the India League and its context – a sustained and effective anticolonial campaign conducted from within the liberal metropole – allows for an interesting examination of normative anticolonialism and imperialism in Britain. The resulting narrative can be positioned against readings of the British empire that do not emphasise conflict or normative consequence: where the British empire is little more than a reluctant adjunct to free-trade,⁷ or a construct that simply rose and fell through shifts in strategic power,⁸ leaving little or no impact upon metropolitan politics or society.⁹ These histories elaborate what Joanna Groot calls the 'liberal wish to find acceptable and safe stories of reform'¹⁰ and, according to Antoinette Burton, are 'not written with dissent and disruption in the lead.'¹¹ The India League reveals an unsafe history of subversive anticolonial agency, political contestation, high imperial emotions and an empire that defended itself fiercely, not only in the colony (as

⁷ John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade,' *Economic History Review* 6: 1 (1953), 1-15.

⁸ John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World* (London: MacMillan, 1988).

⁹ Bernard Porter, *The absent-minded imperialists: empire, society, and culture in Britain* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁰ Joanna De Groot, *Empire and History Writing in Britain since 1750* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 183.

¹¹ Antoinette Burton, *The Trouble with Empire: Challenges to Modern British Imperialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1.

is well known) but from within the politics of Britain itself. The India League found favour and alliance among the British left-wing, while it was bitterly resented and resisted by the Viceroy, Government of India, Conservative Party and the India Office, especially Indian Political Intelligence, the shadowy arm of the *Raj* operating in Britain. This is a version of India's anticolonial struggle which involves many British supporters and provides a response, therefore, to Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper's call to 'treat metropole and colony in a single analytic field.'¹²

The India League was more than just a cause of Indian independence. It was a metropolitan and global wing of the Indian anticolonial movement, an important part of British progressive associational life, a component of the global antifascist left of the late 1930s, a radical sociability between colonised Indian and imperial British and an important demonstration of the anticolonial agency of the British Indian diaspora. It was a form of knowledge that sought to demonstrate the authoritarian brutality of colonial rule and challenge the that the *Raj* was both civilised and civilising. By doing so in Parliament, it also provided a form of improvised and insurgent accountability for the authoritarian colony in an ostensibly liberal empire. To ignore these aspects of the India League because they did not play a demonstrable role in Indian independence would be to fall prey to that a stale, nationalist, metanarrative. It would also prevent the advancement of a secondary argument: that Indian anticolonialism in Britain was organisationally, ideologically and methodologically broader than previously thought. In assessing the dimensions of this anticolonialism, I use both an imperial and a global frame. This is because the India League's globality refused the empire and its silos as frames of reference, but it also resisted and inverted the specific hierarchies of the British empire. Partha Chatterjee precisely anatomised the *Raj* as a 'modern regime of power destined never

¹² Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, 'Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda' in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, eds. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 4.

to fulfil its normalizing mission'¹³ because it could never overcome the 'inherent impossibility of completing the project of the modern state without superseding the conditions of colonial rule.'¹⁴ Read against this – the famous concept of the rule of colonial difference – we can see many of the India League's campaigns as insurgently normalising modernisations. These were an attempt to supersede the conditions of colonial rule by improvising forms of liberal politics, on behalf of India, that overcame the authoritarianism of the colonial state. Through Labour MPs, for example, the India League sought to participate in parliamentary democracy, thereby improvising a way of making the colonial state more accountable to the House of Commons, in lieu of any accountability to Indians. It also attempted to politicise India within British elections and present modern, diasporic forms of *being Indian* in Britain that rejected colonial ideologies that held India and modernity apart. The most dramatic normalising modernisation advanced by the India League was its transmission of the anticolonial idea of a liberal, democratic Constituent Assembly through British politics and the power structures of the empire until it became Labour government policy and the site of India's transformation into a modern, constitutional and democratic republic.

The India League advanced a distinctive anticolonial argument, organised into three broad themes. The first was economic nationalism. Like Naoroji, the India League argued that British rule had impoverished India, which found easy reception among the Labour Party. The second theme was the excessive nature of colonial violence, as shown by the brutality of the police, bombings on the frontier and awful prison conditions. The third was antifascism. This worked by equating British imperialism with fascism, an effective claim during the interwar years of popular antifascist mobilisation. After 1939 this was adapted into an

¹³ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022 ed.), 18.

¹⁴ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 22.

accusation of hypocrisy: how could Britain claim to be fighting an antifascist war when it used fascist methods of rule in its colonial empire? These themes are found throughout this study, woven through other narratives and analytical frames, but are also discussed in detail at various points, as shown in the chapter outline below.

The India League as Anticolonialism

Before outlining the chapter structure, it is important to first clarify a few definitions, terminological choices and to fix the India League's place in relationship to some historiographical debates and disciplinary turns. This includes its place in the literature on anticolonial transnationalism, postcolonialism, the Cambridge School and decolonisation. I also clarify my choice of 'anticolonialism' over 'nationalism.' The India League was clearly an anticolonial organisation and not a nationalist one because its arguments were far more against empire than for the nation. This is a feature of anticolonialism strangely missing from Stephen Howe's influential definitional scheme found in *Anticolonialism in British Politics*. Four claims are necessary for a political movement to be defined as anticolonial: firstly, that national independence is the right of all peoples, secondly that anticolonial struggles are interdependent (preventing their collapse into 'pure nationalism'). Thirdly, that the campaign asserts equality between European and non-European peoples and cultures and, fourthly, 'the commitment to oppose the colonialism of one's own nation.'¹⁵ These universalist criteria are correct but neglect the most obvious (and syntactically self-evident) feature of anticolonialism: that it is opposed to the particularities of empire as a contingent historical formation and especially its visceral practices of rule. This version of anticolonialism is of a greater vintage than Howe's criteria, being as old as European imperialism itself. Bartolomé de las Casas wrote horrified accounts of the Spanish conquest of the Americas. This was not a

¹⁵ Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire 1918-1964* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 1.

theory of what empire was, nor the promotion of a postcolonial national future based on universal principles that empire might presently deny, but an ethical revulsion at what it *did*:

‘the Spaniards then did go to the towns and villages where they found these poor people, in the shelter of their own homes, living and working peacefully with their families and that, catching them unawares, they did then proceed to cut them to pieces one and all...all the inhabitants who did not manage to flee were put to the sword: women, children and old men.’¹⁶

If European imperialism and self-horror were born twins, this was equally true of the British Empire in India. Edmund Burke ‘was so convinced of the crimes perpetrated by the Company, that...it should be deprived of all responsibility of India’¹⁷ and so embarked upon his attack on the first Governor-General, Warren Hastings.¹⁸ As Nicholas Dirks puts it ‘Burke believed that he was interrogating the duplicity of empire itself.’¹⁹ This is strikingly similar to the India League’s Naorojian quest to demonstrate the ‘un-Britishness’ of the empire. During the Second World War, the India League managed to lay before trade union meetings a resolution that noted ‘62,000 arrests, 470 shootings, 1,025 killed and 3,105 wounded. And 958 whipped in the first five months since August last year’²⁰ which does seem like a distant echo of European imperialism’s inaugural self-horror. This is not to suggest that there is a canonical lineage between Las Casas, Burke and the India League, as neither Las Casas nor Burke called for the actual dissolution of empire, and the former even advocated (for a time) the extension of slavery. Instead, this shows that anticolonialism is always *anticolonial*: a critique of the particularities of empire and, increasingly, the ways in which colonial rule

¹⁶ Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, ed. Nigel Griffin (London: Penguin, 2004 edition), 58.

¹⁷ P.J. Marshall, *The Impeachment of Warren Hastings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 1.

¹⁸ Nicholas Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 9

¹⁹ Nicholas Dirks, *The Scandal*, 19.

²⁰ Colonial Information Bureau, *Inside the Empire*, Hull History Centre/Reginald Bridgeman Papers/UBN/26/1 (hereafter, HHC/RBP).

deviates from accepted practices of government in the metropole. The India League was, therefore, more anticolonial than nationalist because it was less concerned with recovering an uncorrupted national essence than it was with proving the incompatibility between colonialism and the purported values of the coloniser.

Saying that anticolonialism was against empire does not mean that it can be reduced to *ressentiment*. Andrew Davies invites us to read it not as a 'reactive form or resistance' but rather a 'diverse and productive form of political activity.'²¹ Robert Young argues that 'anti-colonialism is often identified exclusively, too exclusively, with a provincial nationalism.' Instead, it was 'a form of national internationalism...a diasporic production, a revolutionary mixture of the indigenous and the cosmopolitan, a complex constellation of situated local knowledges combined with radical, universal political principles, constructed and facilitated through international networks.'²² Young's taxonomy is also a good description of the India League: Mulk Raj Anand, a celebrated writer and active India League member, made a similar claim in 1941:

There is the aggressive, predatory nationalism of the Fascist State which has plunged the world in the black hell of this night of history...Our nationalism is rather the urge to be free, the aspiration to live as a part of the human family, with a clear recognition of our responsibilities in the economic, social interdependence of the world...We have long put our faith in that ideal of nationalism as a corollary of internationalism.²³

²¹ Andrew Davies, *Geographies of Anticolonialism: Political Networks Across and Beyond South India c.1900-1930* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020), 20.

²² Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction (Anniversary Edition)* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 2.

²³ Mulk Raj Anand 'The Place of India,' in *Writers in Freedom*, ed. Herman Ould (London: Hutchinson, 1942), 128-30.

Thus, the dissolution of empire was both an inherent good and a necessary step towards universal utopian goals of social justice, democratic rule and unmediated participation in the ‘interdependence of the world.’ Anticolonialism therefore maintained a defiant orthogonality to empire, rather than being overdetermined by *ressentiment*. Neither should anticolonialism be reduced to nationalism if it fails the threshold of universality. Kiran Klaus Patel has argued that we should not deny the nation-state when evaluating transnational anticolonialism: it remains as a crucial point of reference.²⁴ As Aimé Césaire put it: ‘there are two ways to lose oneself: by a walled segregation in the particular or by a dilution in the universal.’²⁵ More broadly, Michael Sandel insists that ‘our ethical capacity’ accrues from ‘the particular people we are – as members of this family or community or nation or people, as bearers of this history, as sons and daughters of that revolution, as citizens of this republic.’²⁶ Indian anticolonialism was neither the walled segregation of nationalism nor a diluted universality but a thickly Sandelian ethical position.

This does not preclude a universal politics: Kwame Anthony Appiah captured this doubled anchoring in his notion of ‘cosmopolitan patriots’ who were ‘attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities’²⁷ while still being committed to the wider world. The India League naturally focused on India but collaborated with other colonial groups, articulated criticisms of empire that could be shared with others, subscribed to universal ideologies like socialism, rallied Britons and others who were not Indian, contributed to global popular antifascism and provided a template for the Movement for Colonial Freedom. Thus, while the India League was focused on India as a referent, it was clearly an organisation of anticolonial transnationalism, a concept which now has its own established

²⁴ Kiran Klaus Patel, ‘Transatlantische Perspektiven transnationaler Geschichte,’ *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 29: 4 (2003), 625-647.

²⁵ Aimé Césaire, *Lettre à Maurice Thorez* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956), 15.

²⁶ Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 179.

²⁷ Kwame Anthony Appiah, ‘Cosmopolitan Patriots’ in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998,) 91.

scholarly industry.²⁸ It is not a perfect fit, however, with some of the analytical priorities of the literature. Its politics did not decentre Europe through global south-south connections (although those were important) but was pitched at a European metropole because that's where imperial power was located. The strength of its campaign came from its ability to conjugate Indian anticolonialism with *European* dissent in the turbulent interwar period: suffragism, socialism, antifascism, pacifism, trades unionism, and even artistic and homosexual subcultures. What this history provincializes, perhaps, is not Europe,²⁹ but something within Europe. As Antoinette Burton puts it 'in traditional British political culture, male citizens spoke for British women, children and colonised peoples.'³⁰ The declining ability of the white, elite, patriotic, imperialist and often militarist male to universalise himself after the First World War, Russian revolution, Great Depression and General Strike was accompanied by the rise of antiracism, socialism, pacifism and suffragism, helping stir the pot of British politics and providing scope and allies for the India League's anticolonialism.

The India League and Postcolonialism

Like Leela Gandhi, to whom this study acknowledges a debt, I share an analytical fondness for postcolonialism's key insights, especially when they map onto historical anticolonial sensibilities. When the Teachers and Students Committee of the India League declared that 'too often children are taught on the assumption that the struggles for political liberty has been and is confined to the European peoples' or that 'judged by the history teaching in most of our schools, one might think that India was non-existent prior to the East India Company'³¹

²⁸ For an outstanding statement on the literature, see *The Anticolonial Transnational: Imaginaries, Mobilities, and Networks in the Struggle Against Empire*, eds. Erez Manela and Heather Streets-Salter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

²⁹ I am, of course, writing to Dipesh Chakrabarty's seminal *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

³⁰ Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1965-1915* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 210.

³¹ Draft Statement for Conference (n.d., likely 1940) Nehru Memorial Museum and Library/Krishna Menon Papers/257 (Hereafter: NMML/KMP).

we see the postcolonial program of de-universalising Europe anticipated by an anticolonial position born of direct historical experience. When Paul Robeson declared at an India League meeting that ‘Indian people must not allow themselves to be talked out of their heritage’³² we see that anxieties over epistemic violence are not the over-tuned sensibilities of radical university departments but were concrete historical fears held by those who witnessed it happening. While the postcolonial programmatic might well map onto historical anticolonial fears there is still little value in reducing the India League’s anticolonialism, which knew itself, and was animate, responsive and contingent to the procrustean bed of postcolonial formalism. Postcolonialism, after all, ‘has tended to designate anti-imperialism “proper” as an action performed solely by the putative non-West upon the putative West.’³³ This reruns the risk of permitting Western imperialism to overdetermine our understanding of what counts as legitimate forms of resistance. Frederick Cooper critiqued Frantz Fanon’s move to establish a form of anticolonialism that ‘had little sympathy for the rhetoric of racial unity or the invocation of symbols of the African past’ because it resulted in the ironic situation where ‘his quest to define the True Anticolonialism allows colonialism, by the logic of inversion, to define the only politics to which he can accord legitimacy.’³⁴ In preventing anticolonialism from being overdetermined by its other, it is best to examine it as something, which in fact, happened. E.P. Thompson understood ‘class as a historical phenomenon’ and not as a “structure,” nor even as a “category” but as something which in fact happens.’³⁵ In a strange coincidence, E.P. Thompson’s father was an active member of the India League and the anticolonialism of the India League is best studied in Thompsonian ways: as something which, in fact, happened. The India League’s anticolonialism was broad, contingent and conceptually messy. Its members and allies said things which would shock postcolonial

³² IPI, Memorandum on India League Reception for Nehru at Kingsway Hall, 27.6.1938, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/293.

³³ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 1.

³⁴ Frederick Cooper ‘The Dialectics of Decolonization: Nationalism and Labor Movements in Postwar French Africa,’ *Tensions of Empire*, 406.

³⁵ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working-Class* (London: Penguin, 2023 ed.), 8.

sensibilities and engaged in strategic essentialisms that enclosed ruthless erasures of Indian difference. Many of its supporters were the very Labour political elites that recognised the principle of Indian freedom but worked hard to reassert European imperialism in East Asia and Africa. Nevertheless, it happened, and so did imperialism. The India League's anticolonialism competed with some very active ideological opponents: the Government of India, India Office, Indian Political Intelligence (IPI), Indian Empire Society, India-Burma Association, Churchill and many Conservatives. This was not a conceptually unified imperialism because it disobeyed postcolonialism's bordering and conceptual consistency. It was, instead, a historically contingent counter-reaction to European and colonial events alike, with 'its roots in the revolutionary surge sweeping Europe in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917.'³⁶ Diehards like Sir Edward Carson feared that European socialism and global anticolonialism were 'all one conspiracy, it is all engineered in the same way, it all has the same object – to destroy our sea power and drive us out of Asia.'³⁷ In this sense, imperialism was as much a vision of Britain: aristocratic, hierarchical, ordered, untroubled by dissenting politics, as it was of a global colonial order.

The India League and the Cambridge School

As is well known, the intellectual, utopian and critical content of Indian anticolonial nationalism has been subject to a sustained evisceration by the 'Cambridge School.' Partha Chatterjee has correctly described this as 'neo-imperialist historians who argue that Indian nationalism was nothing but a scramble for sharing political power with the colonial rulers, its mass following only the successful activation of traditional patron–client relationships, its internal debates the squabbles of parochial factions, its ideology a garb for xenophobia and racial exclusiveness.'³⁸ The India League, headquartered on the Strand, had little money, no

³⁶ Paul Canning, *British Policy towards Ireland, 1921-1942* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 17.

³⁷ House of Commons Debate (Hereafter: HC Deb) 8.7.1920 vol. 131, col. 1718.

³⁸ Partha Chatterjee, *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 117.

promise of power, no patronage to offer clients or traditional authority to invoke and was incapable of articulating xenophobia or racial exclusiveness, given its dependence on campaigning amongst those who were not Indian. Its anticolonialism existed beyond interest or possessive communities of belonging and cannot be defanged by a Cantabrigian emphasis reduction xenophobia, clientelism or jobbery. Moreover, Faisal Devji summarizes the Cambridge School as the conviction that ‘Indians were driven by interests rather than ideas.’³⁹ The India League had nothing to offer *but* ideas and it was the transmission of an idea – a Constituent Assembly for India – from the India League to Labour that was its most important contribution to Indian independence. Admittedly, examining anticolonialism in Britain is not a perfect place to critique the Cambridge school, which represents a particular reading of Indian society. It does, however, allow an engagement with another text which amounts to a Cambridge School history of anticolonial Britain: Nicholas Owen’s *The British Left and India*. Owen finds inevitable disjuncture and disapproval between Congress and Labour: Congress is prevented from reaching out to Labour due to Gandhian self-reliance, while Labour cannot find an Indian nationalism of which socialists could properly approve. Metropolitan anticolonialism, meanwhile, is reduced to ‘parasitism’ and so Labour’s policy for India was reform, not independence, which was only conceded due to force of events.⁴⁰ Given that the India League existed to bridge Owen’s necessary gap, he reduces it to a wing of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), hamstrung by rivalries with other British Indian groups and increasingly disregarded by Labour.⁴¹ This thesis demonstrates that none of these claims have any basis in fact. I do concede that the years between the 1942 Cripps Mission and the 1945 Labour Government was a period of rupture between Congress and the Labour leadership. Unlike Owen, however, I believe that this does not extend to the wider Party and that the leadership’s retreat from its position on India ended with the war and

³⁹ Faisal Devji, ‘C. A. Bayly’, *Past & Present* 237 (2017), 3-12, 9.

⁴⁰ Nicholas Owen, *The British Left and India: Metropolitan Anti-Imperialism 1885-1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴¹ Nicholas Owen, *The British Left and India*, 235-270.

electoral victory. Moreover, while Labour's support for Indian independence can be measured by its relationship with Congress, it does not depend upon it: it is often sufficient but not always necessary. Nobody would mistake Gladstone's clear support for the principle of Irish Home Rule to be the result of an affinity towards the Irish Land League. In 1942 Attlee wrote a letter to Churchill after the outbreak of the Quit India Movement, which stated that Labour was bound to view the 'civil disobedience movement in India as certain to injure the seriously the hope of Indian freedom.'⁴² This shows that the principle of Indian self-determination was not dependent on love of Congress or its political methods.

The Invisible India League

While Congress, the Muslim League and other political movements in India have been the subject of a vast literature, the India League has never been the subject of a substantial study, which is surprising. It mostly appears in the various hagiographies of its (admittedly important) Secretary, V.K. Krishna Menon, the authors of which usually want to gallop ahead to his later roles for the government of India.⁴³ As an organisation based in London, the League falls outside nationalist histories of India while for historians of transnational anticolonialism, the League's close ties with Labour and eventually the high politics of the very metropole that some scholars wish to 'decentre'⁴⁴ may explain why it has received far less attention than the League Against Imperialism, say, with its impeccable transnational

⁴² Clement Attlee to Winston Churchill, 13.8.42 in *The Transfer of Power, 1942-7: Constitutional Relations Between Britain and India*, 12 vols, eds. Nicholas Mansergh, Eric Lumby and Penderel Moon (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970), vol. 2, 530 (hereafter, TP).

⁴³ Menon biographies are a crowded field: Suhash Chakravarty, *Crusader Extraordinary: Krishna Menon and the India League 1932-1936* (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2006), T.J.S. George, *Krishna Menon: A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1964), Janaki Ram, *V.K. Krishna Menon: A Personal Memoir* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977) and Jairam Ramesh, *A Chequered Brilliance: the many lives of V.K. Krishna Menon*, (New Delhi: Viking, 2019).

⁴⁴ See, for example, *Decentering Empire: Britain, India and the Transcolonial World* eds. Durba Ghosh and Dane Kennedy (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2006).

credentials.⁴⁵ Key histories of interwar British anticolonialism often either start too late⁴⁶ or end too early.⁴⁷ Within the period, the League gets only a passing mention in relevant works by Partha Sarathi Gupta, Michelle Louro or Priyamvada Gopal.⁴⁸ Howe ignores the India League as a one-man ‘single-issue’ group⁴⁹ which, as we will see, captures only a small part of its politics. Moreover, there is very little work that makes extensive use of both the Krishna Menon papers in New Delhi and the declassified IPI files. Equally, except for Owen and Rozina Visram in *Asians in Britain*,⁵⁰ there is very little work on the wartime years of the India League, when its network extended through trades unions, the Labour Party, Parliament and, eventually, into the innermost spaces of imperial decision-making.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter explores the solidarities, elective affinities and political friendships that existed between the India League and global anticolonial, antifascist and antiracist movements, as well as British socialists, suffragists, trades unions, Labour MPs and future Ministers. In doing so, it argues for the diversity and broadness of Indian anticolonialism in Britain. It first places the India League within the longstanding affinity between the British left and India and then traces the India League’s ideological and political development from theosophical moderation (Home Rule within an Aryan empire) to radical socialism and Congress-aligned anticolonialism. It argues that, while anticolonial resistance can be understood as a discrete politics with its own internal content, it must also be seen as part of wider progressivisms as it often drew its mobilisational power from its ability to conjugate an

⁴⁵ Daniel Brückenhaus, *Policing Transnational Protest: Liberal Imperialism and the Surveillance of Anticolonialists in Europe, 1905-1945* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire*, 245-278, Disha Karnad Jani ‘The League Against Imperialism, National Liberation, and the Economic Question’, *Journal of Global History* 17: 2 (2022) *The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives*, ed. Michell Louro (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020).

⁴⁶ David Goldsworthy, *Colonial Issues in British Politics 1945-1961: from ‘Colonial Development’ to ‘Winds of Change’* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

⁴⁷ Gregory Claeyns, *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire 1850-1920*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁴⁸ Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement* (London: Macmillan, 1975), Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire*, 291 and Michelle Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism*.

⁴⁹ Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 100.

⁵⁰ Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 320-40.

anticolonial position with other political ideologies and movements. A good example of this was the popular antifascism that played out in the late 1930s in Britain, where the bounded languages of socialism, anticolonialism, antifascism, pacifism, feminism, Pan-Africanism and antiracism fused and produced something new that was greater than the sum of its ideological parts. This produced a politics with global – even universal – horizons and affiliations which I have named, after its most emotive and unifying component (the mobilisation against Francoist fascism), the Spanish Universality. This fusion provided a composite anticolonial-antifascist language and alliance that the India League drew on long after British antifascism was (inconveniently for the League) converted from a politics of the platform and the street into a war led by an imperial state. The anticolonial-antifascist equivalence did not completely collapse into the contradiction presented by the war, but instead became the basis of a campaign among communists, dissenting aristocrats, Labour backbenchers, the artistic and theatrical *avant garde* and mass-member trades unions. This brought the India League real power at the Labour Party Conferences in the crucial years before Indian independence. This, in addition to a formal parliamentary affiliation that exceeded one hundred members after Labour's 1945 landslide, connections with the Cabinet and the role played by the League's leaders as confidantes of Cripps, Nehru and Lord Mountbatten, demonstrates that the India League's anticolonial network was both horizontal, in that it defied the silos of differentiated colonies within the empire, but also 'counter-vertical' in that it reached up to the apex of decision making within the British Empire.

The second chapter argues that the India League's anticolonialism was a form of knowledge, the inverse to the well-studied knowledge-making projects that sustained British colonialism in India. Instead of colonial ethnography, however, the India League took as its subject matter the peculiar historical phenomenon called empire, especially its violence. To this point, the

history of mankind is unquestionably the history of empires but what was uniquely characteristic of European colonialism in the twentieth century was the contradiction between the brutal instantiation of its rule and the values of 'Europe of the Enlightenment, of the development of liberalism, of the French Revolution, and of the classical economists' that articulated 'increasingly powerful claims in late eighteenth-century political discourse to universal principles as the basis for organizing a polity.'⁵¹ Thomas Metcalf captured this tension within liberal imperialism, between the concept of the universality of man and the racist rule of difference.⁵² Ranajit Guha describes the resultant 'absurdity of Britain's claim to have fitted the roundness of colonial autocracy to the squareness of metropolitan liberalism.'⁵³ This absurdity formed the grist of the India League's politics. One of its activists was Michael Carritt, a communist and disillusioned former colonial administrator. While in India, he discerned a 'contradiction between dedicated paternalism and...the blessings of imperial rule.'⁵⁴ More sensationally, he described the 'gap between the professed benefits of "civilised rule" and the administration's outspoken respect for Hitler and his new order.'⁵⁵ It was this widening contradiction that drove the India League's long Naorojian quest to demonstrate the 'Un-Britishness' of the British Empire and short-circuit the agnotological and political gap necessary to the maintenance of liberal imperialism in face of its contradictions. To this end, the India League sponsored a Labour delegation to India in 1932 which was charged with investigating the effects of immiserating Zamindari tax-farming, authoritarian laws, brutal prison conditions and especially the excessive and performative state violence unleashed by a set of repressive ordinances that even officials admitted to amount to Civil Martial Law. In doing so, the India League faced off against a global bureaucratic system of censorship and repression which operated in Britain as well as

⁵¹ Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, 'Between Metropole and Colony,' 1.

⁵² Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁵³ Ranajit Guha 'Not at Home in Empire', *Critical Inquiry* 23: 3 (1997), 482-93, 485.

⁵⁴ Michael Carritt, *A Mole in the Crown: memoirs of a British official in India who worked with the communist underground in the 1930s* (Calcutta: Rupa & Co., 1986), 4.

⁵⁵ Michael Carritt, *A Mole*, 126.

India. This system worked to mask the innate violence of ‘civilising’ liberal imperialism, establishing a dialectic between anticolonial knowledge-making and an agnotological imperialism. Thus, the India League’s epistemic anticolonialism worked to establish an insurgent accountability for the Indian colony via the politics of the liberal metropole. An important component of this campaign was the India League’s rediffusion of anticolonial knowledge into the Imperial Parliament via Labour MPs. This provisionally normalised the anomalous position of the authoritarian colony in a liberal empire and, in a few cases, even succeeded at limiting the absolutism of the *Raj*. Naturally, anticolonial knowledge-making was opposed by the Government of India, India Office and IPI, which came together in an increasingly concerted campaign against the India League. This made use of Conservative MPs corralled by the India Burma Association (IBA), an anti-India League run by the India Office in Britain, supported by IPI and sponsored by British commercial houses in India. IBA existed to devise and disseminate counterarguments to anticolonial knowledge-making. Its existence, therefore, inadvertently discloses the power and reach of its principal discursive adversary, the India League.

While the first chapter examines the India League in Britain and a large part of the second chapter examine the India League in India, the third chapter explores the ways in which the India League incorporated the British Indian diaspora into its anticolonial struggle. This shows the ways in which the diaspora as both individuals and collectives negotiated forms of political modernity that were held to be impossible by the ideologies of empire. By making use of institutional and expressive freedoms in Britain, which were unavailable in India, this reimagined political space available to India as a colony within the differentiated constitutional structure of the British Empire. The intersection between anticolonial identity-making and spatiality are explored in two cases: the first is that of an India League leader,

Bhicoo Batlivala's anticolonial campaigning across the United States of America, a place that was deeply freighted with the security anxieties of the British Empire. In her anticolonial argumentation and self-presentation as a modern Indian woman, Batlivala conquered political space normally unavailable to her gendered self in both imperial, national and universal imaginaries. The rapturous response of the American press and political elites reveals the ways in which her project and personhood overwrote the racist ravings of Katherine Mayo in *Mother India*.⁵⁶ This book, still very popular reading in the USA, held Indian womanhood and modernity to be deeply incompatible, making India and postcolonial modernity an equally impossible combination. The second case explores how the Indian Workers Association (IWA), India League and Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) attempted, during the 1945 British election, to unseat the Secretary of State for India, Leopold Amery. This joint campaign in Amery's Birmingham constituency of Sparkbrook sought to replace him with the half-Indian Communist, Rajani Palme Dutt. This pitted the anticolonial politics of British Indian organised labour against a politician held to personify imperialism in a city that was equally associated with empire through the memory of Joseph Chamberlain. The campaign attempted to hold Amery accountable for political stalemate and famine in India, thus rearranging political space by positing an anticolonial constituency at the imaginative heart of empire. This was an arrogation by the subaltern diaspora of an Indian political modernity, denied by empire, which attempted to force the Secretary of State for India – who was not democratically accountable to any Indians at all – to at least answer to the British Indians of his constituency.

It might be presumed that Indian anticolonialists in Britain would not be subjected to the oppressive methods of the *Raj*, but this was not always the case. This was because the activist Indian diaspora was placed under a disciplinary regime laid down, in secret, by IPI. This

⁵⁶ Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1927).

caused the recolonisation of the ex-colonial subject through the collective securitisation of working-class Indians in the West Midlands and a long campaign to de-citizen Menon. This project made use of ethnographic assumptions and even governing modalities that were unmistakably colonial, abridging metropolitan liberalism through the creation of colonial space in Britain. The third chapter also uncovers Menon's unwitting revenge, however: how his appointment as the first High Commissioner for an independent India made IPI's continued existence as an imperial intelligence agency untenable, demonstrating how India's 'normalisation' into an independent state helped abolish secret colonial space in Britain.

This discussion of IPI raises a methodological issue that requires immediate clarification. Aside from the Krishna Menon Papers in New Delhi (a misnomer as they contain both his private papers and the institutional papers of the India League dating to before the period of his leadership), IPI's archive is the most important source of information on the India League. Its archive has the characteristic vastness and granularity of institutionalised paranoia. It also reflects IPI's anomalous position of being an agent of a colonial government located in liberal Britain - its files represent nothing less than a colonial archive of anticolonial Britain (and the world). The irony of IPI is that its surveillance of Indian anticolonialism in Britain has produced a far greater record of anticolonial agency, thought and connection than those organisations and individuals could ever have deposited themselves due to poverty or ephemerality, preserving them for history. When reading against the colonial grain of IPI's archive, the most important check is communism and terrorism: IPI tended to hallucinate communist connections or terrorist proclivities when there were none to justify surveillance, win the collaboration of Britain's other security services and legitimise its shadowy methods.

The India League's most important book, *The Condition of India*,⁵⁷ contains the first published recommendation for a Constituent Assembly for India. By calling for a Constituent Assembly, a democratic and liberal institution premised upon uniform citizenship, the India League was pursuing its most important campaign for India's political modernity. The Assembly itself ultimately produced India's most important expression of that postcolonial modernity: a liberal and democratic Constitution. This, through its universal franchise, enumerated rights, judicial review, meaningful federalism, uniform citizenship and other liberal provisions, rejected the ruling assumptions of the *Raj* in profound and irruptive ways, normalising India into the condition of political modernity. The fourth and final chapter surveys the transmission of the Constituent Assembly idea through the India League's network to complete the argument that the India League made an important contribution to Indian independence. It differs considerably from the first chapter even as it follows the same periodisation and some of the same events. This is due to an important thematic difference between the India League of the first chapter (embedded in global and British left-wing politics). and the League of the final chapter. This involves it in the political and constitutional controversies of the emerging Indian and Pakistani nations, in which the Constituent Assembly idea played an important part. It leaves the politics of the street and the platform, therefore, to enter the well-explored paths of decolonial policy and communal negotiation, including Congress declarations, Cripps and Cabinet Missions, Viceregal initiatives and the politics of the Muslim League. It nevertheless offers a fresh reading of Indian independence, one that foregrounds British party difference, non-official initiatives and anticolonial agency, all without rehabilitating a simple nationalist narrative. The India League pursued its politics far from India itself and derived much of its effectiveness from the support of dissenters among the imperial British, particularly the Labour Party. This also

⁵⁷ India League (in this instance, Leonard Matters, Krishna Menon, Bertrand Russell, Monica Whately and Ellen Wilkinson), *The Condition of India: Being the Report of the Delegation sent to India by the India League in 1932* (London: Essential News, 1933) (hereafter: IL, COI).

allows the complication of a historiographical consensus which holds Indian independence to be the product of postwar British incapacity and where the key analytic is a geostrategic 'official mind' seeking to maximise British interest amidst the collapse of the global order that sustained European imperialism. On a simple level, we can trace key decolonial policy departures, such as a Constituent Assembly, to prewar initiatives with non-official and party-political origins. Moreover, by emphasising the differences between the Conservatives and Labour on the question of India, it is possible to show that the course and timing of British policy towards Indian independence was not the product of inevitability or strategy. Instead, it was contingent, partisan and anticolonial, with much owed to Labour's 1945 electoral victory and the influence of the India League within the party. Lastly, we can further problematise the analytical categories of 'metropole' and colony' by explaining the end of empire through through the debordering effects of Labour-India League-Congress solidarities, not to mention the ersatz alliance between the Churchillian Conservatives and the Muslim League, as the Tories sought to use Pakistan to first spook away Indian independence and then to attenuate it.

If the India League played a role in the achievement of Indian independence it also contributed to Partition. This was because the Constituent Assembly would destroy the power of minority organisations, particularly the Muslim League, by reducing it from parity at the imperial conference (like the Round Table Conferences) requiring unanimity to minority within a representative institution that operated on the principle of majority voting. For the London-based India League this was not directed at Indian Muslims *per se* but against Conservative evocations of the 'minority veto:' the assertion that no constitutional progress was possible in India without expressed communal agreement. The Muslim League was bitterly aware of its fate within such an Assembly, especially after 1937 when they learned

how Congress could disempower them in representative institutions in general, let alone one that would permanently determine the nature of the Indian state. This paradox of the Constituent Assembly stems from its status as an idea: as a signifier that floated just enough to be the object of an idealistic campaign among diverse groups, but to the Muslim League, Bhim Rao Ambedkar and others, appear a sinister instrument by which Congress could become the nation, leaving little mystery as to why the Muslim League chose Pakistan over minoritisation in India's Constituent Assembly. Thus, the India League's considerable anticolonial agency achieved its final goal: convincing Labour that India deserved independence through a Constituent Assembly, but the secondary aim of minoritising the Muslim League backfired completely, with extraordinary (and for many, deeply tragic) consequences.

I.

Building the Anticolonial Network, 1912-1945

While later chapters emphasize the Indianness of the India League, this chapter explores its transnational anticolonialism and antifascism but also its distinctively British nature. That the India League is an example of global anticolonialism can be seen through its alliance with wider campaigns, including for Abyssinia, China and colonised territories in Africa. It also forged alliances and shared political languages with suffragists, socialists, antiracists and especially antifascists, participating in the United and Popular Fronts, as well as the campaign

for Republican Spain. This politics equated fascism, imperialism and exploitative capitalism, producing a corresponding and inverted category of the oppressed that included European victims of these global forces. This, in turn, enabled potent solidarities that crossed the usual boundaries of empire and flattened its hierarchies. This enabled the India League's anticolonialism to exceed itself through its organisational solidarities and ideological fusions, making its politics one of global – even universal – emancipatory extent. The India League was also distinctively British, however, as the liberal democratic institutions and progressive politics of the metropole – the 'soft heart' of the otherwise authoritarian British Empire – formed its field of opportunity. Thus, in addition to Indian constitutional or political developments, it was the prospects and frustrations of British parliamentary democracy, the ebbs and flows of the Labour movement, trades unionism, the far left and the formation and dissolution of political fronts in Britain that gave form and structure to the India League's campaigns. This chapter demonstrates the breadth and diversity of Indian anticolonialism in Britain, the reasons for the support the India League received from diverse individuals and organisations, the methods it used (including cultural practices), the remarkable extent of the support it arduously built up over time and the power and influence this won within a Labour movement that was itself rising towards power in Britain and its empire.

Ashish Nandy invites us to consider the 'numerically small but psychologically significant response of many who opted out of their colonising society for the cause of India.'⁵⁸ The answer offered here exceeds the question as it demonstrates that the number was not small, but large enough to play a role in overturning the *Raj*. In her elaboration of Nandy's idea, Leela Gandhi uses the term 'politics of friendship' because 'it privileges, after Derrida, the trope of friendship as the most comprehensive philosophical signifier for all those invisible affective gestures that refuse alignment along the secure axes of filiation to seek expression

⁵⁸ Ashish Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of the Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 36

outside, if not against, possessive communities of belonging.’⁵⁹ Faisal Devji notes that ‘the choice upon which friendship must be founded is remarkable fragile because it has to remain disinterested to be itself.’⁶⁰ It was out of this disinterested politics of friendship that the India League made its network among the British, producing an insurgent and cosmopolitan sociability that exceeded any possessive community of belonging and which did not follow any recognisable axis of affiliation. This politics of friendship between the British left-wing and Indian anticolonialism preceded the India League by many decades, however, and the organisation therefore pursued a form of politics which had already been established. This chapter begins, therefore, with a description of the early cooperation between Naoroji and Hyndman of the SDF, as well as wider connections between the British left and India. It then surveys the India League’s birth among the Theosophical Society and the reasons for a subsequent parting of ways as the India League traded the strict moderation of theosophy for an alliance with the Independent Labour Party. This, in turn enabled it to keep abreast of a Congress Party radicalising towards the goal of *purna swaraj*. This politics of friendship was not confined to the colony-metropole bilateral, however. As the League engaged with the antifascist left of the late 1930s, its politics exceeded the binarism of anticolonial friendship as it participated in, and helped produce, a political fusion of horizons between socialism, feminism, anticolonialism, antiracism, Pan-Africanism and other progressive movements into a grand fascist alliance, powered by the emotive resonance of fighting Franco, which I call the Spanish Universality. This brought the India League access to Labour elites and provided a reservoir of alliances and arguments for the India League long after the antifascist-anticolonial fusion collapsed into the contradictions of the Second World War. This was the basis of the India League’s long campaign among Labour MPs, Trades Unions and the leadership of the Labour Party. Alan Lester’s landmark intervention sought to re-spatialize

⁵⁹ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 10.

⁶⁰ Faisal Devji, *The Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 68.

empire beyond the vertical structure of centre and periphery by reconceptualising it as a network.⁶¹ Drawing on this, historians of transnational anticolonial networks often identify the ways in which such networks intrinsically defied imperial silos through their horizontal solidarities and mobilities.⁶² The India League's network did this, but it also reached upwards, via figures like Cripps and wider pressure within the Labour party, to the upper reaches of imperial power.

The British Left and India: An Old Alliance

Labour provided a fertile political field for the India League because the British left had long offered a degree of political friendship to Indian aspirations. This can be traced to the Social Democratic Federation, Britain's first organised socialist party. The SDF had been founded in 1881 by Henry Myers Hyndman, who had connections with the Congress trio of Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bal Gangadhar Tilak.⁶³ Hyndman had been present at the opening of India House in Highgate and was politically influenced by his friendship with Naoroji. It was British imperialism in India that drove Hyndman 'from radicalism to socialism rather than the reverse.'⁶⁴ As Howe notes, Hyndman's *England for All*, 'the most important founding statement of English Marxism'⁶⁵ was entirely hostile to the imperial mission. Belfort Bax of the SDF also held that imperialism should be opposed by socialists due to its ability to renew capitalism and so the SDF 'consistently opposed all manifestations of British imperialism.'⁶⁶ Its periodical, *Justice*, made unambiguous calls for British withdrawal from India from as early as 1885.⁶⁷ The affinity ran both ways: Naoroji believed

⁶¹ See Alan Lester, 'Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire', *History Compass* 4: 1 (2006), 124–141.

⁶² See, for example, *Minor Transnationalism*, eds. Françoise Lionet and Shu-Mei Shih (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

⁶³ Prabha Ravi Shankar, 'Henry Mayers Hyndman (1842-1921) and the Radicalisation of the Indian National Congress', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 66, (2005), 1041-1049, 1041.

⁶⁴ Gregory Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*, 125.

⁶⁵ Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 28.

⁶⁶ Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven, CN and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 169.

⁶⁷ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 35.

that British workers could never win a fight with British capitalists enriched by the plunder of India. The wider BCINC had no hope for the Conservatives, especially after the 1900 'khaki' election and after watching the decline of the Liberal Party, 'looked to Britain's working class as a natural ally'⁶⁸ and focused on addressing 'radical and socialist organisations.'⁶⁹ The BCINC witnessed 'the year of the great London dock strike, of the successful organising drive among unskilled workers which ushered in the tumultuous movement known as New Unionism, sparking the revival of British socialism and leading ultimately to the foundation of the Labour Party.'⁷⁰ The BCINC's aim became clear: 'to rouse the English working classes, to whom political power has so largely passed, to a sense of the duties which England owes to India.'⁷¹ As an interesting aside, one of the leaders of New Unionism, Ben Tillett, went on to support the India League.⁷² The British left could even take up a more radical position than early Indian anticolonialists: Naoroji was apprehensive of Hyndman's calls for the BCINC to abandon moderation⁷³ and a radical 1912 speech by the future ILP leader, Fenner Brockway, was criticised for its immoderation by a young student called Jawaharlal Nehru.⁷⁴ This fin-de-siècle radicalism would continue down a long chain. Hyndman would convert George Lansbury to anticolonialism⁷⁵ and Lansbury would serve as an early chairman of the India League as well as Leader of the Labour Party in 1931, when his two lieutenants were Attlee and Cripps. These were the two men who would agree the terms of Indian independence with Nehru and the India League in 1938 and slowly convert them into policy over the following decade.

⁶⁸ Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900*, 198.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁷² See NMML/KMP/197 and 451.

⁷³ Jonathan Schneer, *Imperial London*, 200.

⁷⁴ Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography 1889-1947* 2 Vols (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975-1984), 1, 23-24.

⁷⁵ See George Lansbury, *My Quest for Peace* (London: Michael Joseph, 1938), 15.

Labour and Indian anticolonial thought were also capable of mutual comprehension, especially on economic questions. For all its plurality and resulting tendency towards fissiparousness, Indian anticolonial nationalists could, as Joya Chatterji notes, agree on one theme: British rule had impoverished India. This found its most powerful early exposition in the work of Naoroji⁷⁶ and Romesh Chandra Dutt⁷⁷ who marshalled statistical evidence in the best traditions of enlightenment empiricism, using official British sources to vacate British claims of benevolent imperialism. This economic nationalism would anchor Indian anticolonialism until 1947 because ‘it had the great virtue of tapping a chord and holding together a diverse political constituency.’⁷⁸ This economic critique created an important, long-lived, vocabulary. Naoroji’s seminal attack on British imperialism for ‘draining’ India’s economy was entitled *Poverty and Un-British Rule*, while for the founder of the first precursor to the India League, Annie Besant, it was the ‘founding duty’ of this organisation to inform the British of the repressive ‘un-British methods’⁷⁹ of government found in their empire in India.

This sense of imperial duplicity, familiar even to Edmund Burke, corresponded to British socialism’s culture of research. The India League’s most important text, *The Condition of India* is clearly heir to Naoroji’s economic nationalism. The title also recalls Thomas Carlyle and the Condition of England debates that arose in the wake of Chartism and which further disclosed the sensibility that was at least as old as Henry Mayhew:⁸⁰ that the world of the working-class was remote – even another country – that demanded special investigation.

Little wonder that the Fabian duo of Beatrice and Sidney Webb could tour India in much the

⁷⁶ Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1901).

⁷⁷ Joya Chatterji, *Shadows*, 14.

⁷⁸ Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 14.

⁷⁹ Home Rule for India League, ‘Pamphlet No. 1: What India Wants’, n.d. (likely 1916) NMML/Annie Besant Papers/Part II/14c-D-19(5) (hereafter, ABP).

⁸⁰ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Those That Cannot Work, and Those That Will Not Work* (London: Griffin Bohn, 1851).

same spirit as they might have had setting off into Whitechapel from Toynbee Hall, producing a book that supported aspects of the imperial mission, while also engaging in some penetrative critique.⁸¹ James Ramsay MacDonald also visited India in 1907 and argued that ‘the strident assertion of the magnificence of British political genius has allayed no pangs of famine and soothed no grievances’⁸² and offered the unequivocal conclusion that ‘we have impoverished India.’⁸³ In 1909 the founder of the Labour Representation Committee (the forerunner of the Labour Party), Keir Hardie, came to India in a visit that was considered seditious for even taking place. According to Hardie, the *Raj* was little more than ‘a huge military despotism tempered somewhat by an official bureaucracy’⁸⁴ and there was ‘abundant evidence to justify the belief that the condition of the Indian peasant had worsened under British rule.’⁸⁵ Britain was not even needed to hold the ring between India’s diverse communities since ‘it has been said that owing to the diversity of castes and creeds, India could not work a system of popular elections. That statement is capable of easy disproof.’⁸⁶ Hardie later pledged his fledgling party to Indian freedom.⁸⁷ In 1918 the Labour Party Conference declared that

this Labour Conference endorses the policy of Home Rule for India, believing that the time has arrived when our brothers in all parts of India are capable of controlling their own affairs, equally along with South Africa, Australia and other British Dominions, and hereby pledges itself to assist in every way possible to bring about this much desired reform; further we desire that all Labour Members in the British House of Commons shall do all in their power to bring pressure upon the present Government,

⁸¹ Beatrice Webb and Sidney Webb, *Indian Diary*, ed. Niraja Gopal Jayal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990 ed.).

⁸² James Ramsay MacDonald, *Labour and Empire* (London: George Allen, 1907), 105.

⁸³ James Ramsay MacDonald, *Labour and Empire*, 104.

⁸⁴ Keir Hardie, *India: Impressions and Suggestions* (London: Independent Labour Party, 1909), 71.

⁸⁵ Keir Hardie, *India*, 90.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 122.

⁸⁷ Nicholas Owen, *The British Left and India*, 85.

without undue delay, in order that these people shall be given their just rights, which have been due to them throughout all time, including the right of self-government.⁸⁸

By 1927 so many Labour Members, Fabians and Trades Union delegates had visited India that V.H. Rutherford felt obliged to present a synthesis. This combined the agendas for social reform (in both Britain and India) with Indian independence:

There is a genuine consensus of opinion amongst all members of the Labour Party who have been to India to examine for themselves on the spot, that India is exploited for the benefit of British capitalism and to depress and degrade the standard of Labour in Great Britain; that the British Bureaucracy is as despotic and tyrannical as ever; that the so-called reforms are shadows without substance; that British rule has impoverished India and enriched England materially, has failed to solve the problems of poverty, housing, sanitation, medical aid, education, agriculture, self-defence, labour, etc., that Indians only are capable of solving these problems; that the fight for economic, political and industrial justice at home should be joined with the fight for Self-Government (on a broad and democratic basis) in India.⁸⁹

In 1928 the Labour Party's Committee on Imperial Questions ruled that 'the policy of the Labour Party with regard to India is to be found in two Resolutions adopted by the National Party – the first at Liverpool in 1925, the second at the annual conference at Blackpool in 1927' both of which 'recognised the right of the Indian people to full self-government and self-determination.'⁹⁰ This affinity was both long-lasting and strong: the 1941 Labour Party

⁸⁸ Labour Party, *Report of Annual Conference*, 1918 (hereafter, LP/RAC).

⁸⁹ V.H. Rutherford, *India and the Labour Party* (The Labour Publishing Company, 1927), 47.

⁹⁰ Labour Party Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions, 'The Labour Party and the Simon Commission,' Memorandum, 6.1928, People's History Museum/Labour Party Archive/Labour Party Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions/Memos 22-30A/15-16, 5.

Conference saw a remarkable speech that entirely integrated India into Labour's canonised history:

We here think we are the spiritual descendants of those who fought and sometimes died for liberty, of those who died on the battlefield and on the scaffold, of the Scottish Covenanters, who died on the moorlands, of the Tolpuddle Martyrs and the Chartists; but if we condone this iniquity in India, we are not spiritual descendants of those people, but the spiritual descendants of their persecutors.⁹¹

From Theosophy to the Politics of Friendship: 1912-1930

Unsurprisingly, Labour was present at the birth of the India League. Reginald Sorensen held that the first ancestor of the League was 'a small committee, established in 1912, to campaign for Indian self-government, or "Home Rule" as it was then called.' Lansbury was an important early supporter.⁹² He had been appalled by Conservative anti-Boer rhetoric during the 1900 Khaki election and, during his parliamentary campaign for Bow and Bromley, appealed to the voters to think of 'your fellow subjects in India...dying by the millions of famine and pestilence, and the imperial government have refused to grant a single penny to relieve their suffering.'⁹³ This committee was later re-founded on a more durable basis as the British Auxiliary of the Home Rule League, which Besant had founded in India. This connection was short-lived, however, as the Indian organisation collapsed amidst infighting,

⁹¹ LP/RAC, 1941.

⁹² Reginald Sorensen, 'The India League: A Note by Reginald Sorensen,' 6.9.1945, NMML/KMP/191.

⁹³ Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900*, 237.

while the Auxiliary was kept alive by British theosophists.⁹⁴ Lansbury, however, remained a consistent supporter.

Since the India League was seeking to bridge the worlds of Indian anticolonialism and British socialism, Naorojian economic nationalism became one of its favoured arguments. Annie Besant's 1915 manifesto *India: A Nation: A Plea for Indian Self-government* directly cites Naoroji when describing 'the grinding extortion of the British government [which] has effected the impoverishment of the country and people to an unparalleled extent.' She went on to conclude that 'the country was far more prosperous under "Native Rule."⁹⁵ Besant took Congress as an authority on India, rather than officials:

let any unprejudiced student turn over the Resolutions passed by the Congress during thirty years, and see how it pointed with unerring finger to the causes of that suffering – the drain of Indian wealth to England, the exorbitant cost of alien rule, the ever-increasing military expenditure, the sacrifice of Indian industries, the land-tax ever rising and condemning the peasantry to perpetual indebtedness, and to a hopeless poverty and semi-starvation that have no parallel in any other civilised nation. It is these facts, covered up by officials, but laid bare by Congress, which make Home Rule necessary, if a catastrophe is to be avoided⁹⁶

This was elaborated by a dissenting history that rejected claims of improvement: 'under Indian rulers, the land-tax was levied on produce, not on area, hence varied with good and bad harvests, and with the fertility of the soil; this method had also the advantage that it left to the cultivator sufficient food and seed-grain, and allowed land to lie fallow without tax for

⁹⁴ NMML/KMP/619 and IPI, 'History Sheet of Annie Besant', BL/IOR/2/TEMP/34/338.

⁹⁵ Annie Besant, *India: A Nation: A Plea for Self-Government* (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1923), 85.

⁹⁶ Annie Besant, *India*, xvii.

renovation, while now it is cultivated incessantly and so gradually deteriorates.⁹⁷ The result was famine, which Besant partly blamed on:

the financial drain of the 'Home Charges' and the huge bureaucracy. Partly the destruction of the manufactures of India for the profit of Lancashire...partly the destruction of the communal system of land tenure, the imposing of the English system of landlordism, of rigid rents and taxes levied in money in lieu of the flexible indigenous system of proportionate rents and taxes paid in kind; partly the network of railways facilitating the buying of crops and sweeping them away for export.⁹⁸

Against the permanent assertion that Indian nationalism was the plaything of the elites, Besant argued that 'the danger to the British Rule lies far more in the misery of the masses than in the discontent of the educated.'⁹⁹ She also put forward a recognisably ethnic and spiritualist argument that India was 'a continuum, and her Aryan civilisation an unbroken whole...but she is always India: always Aryan, the Mother Imperishable.' India was a 'country in her religious literature. She is *Jambudvipa* – Ashoka is called King of *Jambudvipa* and *Baratavarsha*, *Aryavarta*...In Hindu prayers the name of the great rivers are recited, the sacred places range from Hardwar to Kanchi and Badarikednarnath to Rameshvara, from Dwaraka to Jaganath. And the people, ever reciting these, knew them all as their motherland.' This civilisational nationalism rejects the claim that 'India's history only begins with Alexander as western writers say...there is plenty of evidence ...apart from Indian literature of a civilisation rivalling at least those of Egypt and Assyria.'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ibid, 84.

⁹⁸ *New India*, 21.4.1917.

⁹⁹ Annie Besant, *India*, xix.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 5.

Civilisational nationalism mixed with theosophical syncretism meant, however, that Indian civilisational virtues could still be harnessed to Britain's spiritual interests through 'the union of India and England in a mighty commonwealth' where the 'strong concrete mind of Britain would be permeated and illuminated by the sublime spirituality of India.'¹⁰¹ Thus, while India 'did without England for millennia, and flourished amazingly; she could do without England for millennia to come; but the two need each other...and India desires to be linked with England in that future, but on a footing of perfect equality and on none other.'¹⁰² A 1923 pamphlet by Besant defended India's claim to 'sovereign self-government' but argued that India 'would lie open to invasion' if fully independent 'because martial spirit of India was sleeping.' How Britain's military architecture coexisted with 'perfect equality' is left unexplained. Besant's failure to adopt an unambiguously anticolonial position is understandable, given the period. It would take Congress many years before taking the plunge into *purna swaraj*. Theosophical anticolonialism could never follow Congress when it did, however. Taken to its logical extreme, Besant's millenarian Pan-Aryanism might prefer imperial spiritual-ethnic irredentism rather than the breakup of global empires into independent nations. Besant longed for India and Britain, the 'eldest and youngest branches of the Aryan race' to form a 'union that shall hereafter blossom into flowers...the fragrance of which shall permeate the world...not for naught has the Indo-British Aryan Commonwealth been raised to stately grandeur.' The political objectives for her British Auxiliary were for India 'to be a Sovereign Nation within her own borders, owning as a link with other Free Nations the Imperial Crown and sending her sons to the future Imperial Council. Britain and India hand in hand, but an India Free.'¹⁰³ This limited the Auxiliary's objectives and membership: when a Mr. Malik attempted to join he received the unfriendly reply that 'Our

¹⁰¹ Annie Besant, *Apart or Together*, n.d. (pamphlet), a copy can be found in NMML/ABP/Part II/14c-D-19(5), see also 'Objectives for India', n.d. (memorandum) NMML/ABP/Part II/14c-D-19(5).

¹⁰² Annie Besant, *India*, 4.

¹⁰³ Annie Besant, 'Objectives', NMML/ABP/Part II/14c-D-19(5).

league is working for dominion status, Home rule within the empire and our invitation is only to those of your friends who have that political goal before them.’¹⁰⁴ There were very few Indians in the early organisation, which was largely limited to dedicated theosophists such as Curupumallage Jinarajadasa. For all of Besant’s cataloguing of colonial crimes, therefore, the theosophical Auxiliary was less a creature of political friendship between the British and India than a form of reforming orientalism: arrogating to itself the right to represent Indian aspirations to the imperial metropole and present them in a way that justified Besant’s contradictory project of removing colonial oppression through Home Rule within a renewed, Pan-Aryan, empire.

It was through theosophy and Besant’s connections that the Auxiliary developed contacts with Congress, including future leaders like Bhulabhai Desai¹⁰⁵ and established its early networks in Britain, bringing in crucial activists and leaders like Benegal Shiva Rao¹⁰⁶ and above all, Vengali Krishnan Krishna Menon. Whilst the India League cannot be reduced to Menon (which is often implied by his biographers), he was certainly the central figure of the India League and the principal source of its energies over a campaign that stretched from the early 1930s until 1947. Menon came into the Auxiliary via the Brothers of Service in Adyar and the Young Theosophists in Britain.¹⁰⁷ He brought connections to a wider base in India, including the press, who he was encouraging to take notice of Labour Party declarations as evidence of ‘the beginning of *Swaraj* India.’¹⁰⁸ While Menon was happy to make use of theosophical channels to recruit Indians for League work, he was becoming less involved with the Society, declining to speak at Theosophical Society meetings if they were not concerned with Indian independence.¹⁰⁹ Unlike Besant, Menon had little time for the empire:

¹⁰⁴ British Auxiliary to Mr. Malik, n.d. (likely, 1928) NMML/KMP/194.

¹⁰⁵ Suhash Chakravarty, *Crusader Extraordinary*, 402.

¹⁰⁶ Menon to Redfern, 11.1.1930, NMML/KMP/558.

¹⁰⁷ Secretary of the Manchester Group (Commonwealth of India League, hereafter, CIL) to C.R. Groves, 22.8.1928, NMML/KMP/194.

¹⁰⁸ Menon to the Editor of *Mahratta*, 2.11.1929, NMML/KMP/558.

¹⁰⁹ Moolraj Menon to Krishna Menon, 21.10.1929, and Haeger to G. Munen, 26.11.1930, KMP/NMML/558.

‘one looked at the record of British rule in India with horror; never had it been totally free of shootings and repressive measures...the British did not go to India to civilise her by divine right, it was because there was money in the country and the British Lion had an insatiable appetite for wealth.’ He rejected Home Rule and Dominion Status: ‘Let India break away.’¹¹⁰ Unlike Besant, therefore, he was keen that the organisation keep up with Congress.¹¹¹

While much of the campaigning energy of the Auxiliary was directed through theosophical conferences, it also looked to Labour. T.H. Redfern, the Auxiliary’s secretary, felt ‘that somebody should represent India, and this should appeal...to the Labour Party and socialist bodies, for if they are not going to listen to India’s plea and claims and just demands, where in England is India to find a platform on which she can expect her claim to have at least a hearing?’¹¹² The theosophy-Labour connection was helped along by Lansbury and a chairman of the League, Peter Freeman, who was a Welsh theosophical leader and Labour MP. The Auxiliary’s campaign among Labour was immaculately polite: ‘personal conversation, press, public meetings, *New India* circulation, speaker’s study groups, addresses to guild forums etc.’ The favoured venues were to be ‘meetings of the Labour Party, Co-operative guilds, Worker’s educational associations and various peace bodies’¹¹³ alongside parliamentary work undertaken by Graham Pole MP.¹¹⁴ It could produce some notable results, nevertheless: in 1923 the Auxiliary held a conference on India with more than 2,400 attendants and with the Leader of the Labour Party, MacDonald, billed as a speaker.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ ENSYR, 25.6.1930, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/356.

¹¹¹ T.J.S. George, *Krishna Menon*, 55.

¹¹² Redfern to Chambres, 17.12.1928, KMP/NMML/KMP/194.

¹¹³ Redfern to Cannan, 17.8.28, KMP/NMML/KMP/194.

¹¹⁴ Redfern to Peter Freeman, 13.1.1929, NMML/KMP/194.

¹¹⁵ From the Queen’s Hall Demonstration (National Conference/National Council) to Secretaries of Trades Unions and other Labour Organisations, 12.5.1923, NMML/ABP/Part II/14c-D-19(5).

By the mid 1920s the Auxiliary was occupied with pushing forward Besant's Commonwealth of India Bill.¹¹⁶ This called for self-determination for a federal India and included a comprehensive list of rights, but reserved defence and foreign affairs to the Viceroy and kept India under the imperial crown. It had been drafted in consultation with forty-three selected Indian leaders in an allegedly 'all party conference' that included no members of Congress (though some of its provisions found its way into the Nehru Report). In 1925 Macdonald permitted the Bill to be discussed at the Labour Conference and the bill's supporters, some eleven MPs, went on to serve in his government.¹¹⁷ Although it got a hearing in the House of Commons, it was as a Private Member's Bill and progress stalled on the second reading as the Labour Government fell. After this failure and with Besant distracted by the publication of her *Coming of the World Teacher* and preparing to travel to America alongside Jiddu Krishnamurti, the British Auxiliary was in the doldrums. It appears to have had only one meeting in 1926¹¹⁸ and between February and May 1927, it was searching for a new name. After considering the 'Dominion of India League' and the 'New India League' it settled on the 'Commonwealth of India League' based on a resolution proposed by Jinarajadasa and Gandhi's old friend, H.S.L. Polak.¹¹⁹ In 1928 the British Auxiliary of the Home Rule for India League was pronounced dead and the Commonwealth of India League (CIL) that replaced it barely existed, with a dire need for workers.¹²⁰ What little work it did continued to piggyback off theosophical conferences as it assumed that it was only theosophists that would have 'sympathy with India.'¹²¹ The CIL had some presence in Stockport, Manchester and Liverpool, leading to the formation of a Merseyside branch¹²² though even this, the most active section, was 'entirely composed of [seven] English people.'¹²³ When attempting to

¹¹⁶ IPI to Silver 19.1.1928 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/356.

¹¹⁷ CIL to the Secretaries of the Labour Parties and the Trades and Labour Councils, (no specific date) 3.1930, NMML/KMP/171.

¹¹⁸ NMML/KMP/169.

¹¹⁹ British Auxiliary, Minutes of Committee Meeting, 13.5.1927, NMML/KMP/169.

¹²⁰ Redfern to Evans, (specific date unclear).10.1928, NMML/KMP/194.

¹²¹ Redfern to Mrs. Cannan, 17.8.1928 NMML/KMP/194.

¹²² CIL, 'Report on Work', n.d., 1928, NMML/KMP/194.

¹²³ unsigned to J.H. Cannon, 17.8.1928, NMML/KMP/194.

establish a London headquarters, Menon and Redfern could not figure out what the rules of the League were, who was secretary of the London branch or whether it existed at all.¹²⁴

The CIL may have ceased to exist at this point were it not rescued by the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and its leader, Brockway. At the 1925 Labour Party Conference, Besant had been outflanked by Brockway and the ILP, acting in consultation with Nehru.¹²⁵ They successfully moved an amendment which included Congress's demand for 'full self-government and self-determination.'¹²⁶ The ILP opposed Besant's bill because it had 'not been endorsed by a considerable number of representative Indians' and held that it was a bill 'British socialists must deplore.' The ILP called instead for an 'authoritative measure to be endorsed by a representative convention.'¹²⁷ This early radicalism is unsurprising as the ILP had strong anticolonial tendencies. It had associations with critical thinkers like J.A. Hobson, H.N. Brailsford, E.D. Morel, Leonard Barnes and Leonard Woolf, as well as Indian Marxists like Shapurji Saklatvala and Rajani Palme Dutt. Its 1917 Conference on the Russian Revolution called for the complete independence of Ireland, India and Egypt¹²⁸ and, in 1924, the ILP had taken the lead in pressing Labour to prepare India for immediate self-government.¹²⁹

Brockway, in particular, was a passionate supporter of Indian independence. Born in India, he had served as the Secretary to the BCINC and been invited to India as a fraternal delegate in 1927, where he was impressed by the moral force and clarity that he saw in *panchayati* politics and addressed a 'huge demonstration under Congress auspices.'¹³⁰ During the visit, he had been injured in a car accident and was appalled by the separation of patients in Vellore

¹²⁴ Redfern to Miss Davey, 18.10.1928, NMML/KMP/194.

¹²⁵ Fenner Brockway, *Towards Tomorrow: The Autobiography of Fenner Brockway* (London: Hart-Davis, McGibbon, 1977), 98 and Nehru to Rangaswami Iyengar 7.9.1927 in Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, eds. and Sarvepalli Gopal and Madhavan K. Palat, 85 vols (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1972-2019), vol. 2, 331 (Hereafter: SWJN).

¹²⁶ Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism*, 111, LP/RAC, 1925.

¹²⁷ ILP, *India Today*, 22.

¹²⁸ ILP/RAC, 1917.

¹²⁹ Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism*, 68.

¹³⁰ Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left: Thirty Years of Platform, Press, Prison and Parliament* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1942), 172.

Hospital into separate wards for Indian, Anglo-Indians and Europeans, the far superior conditions for the latter and the dire pay and conditions of the Indian nurses.¹³¹ Brockway followed Naoroji's arguments that the poverty of India was the fault of Britain, 'responsible for the administration of India for two hundred years.'¹³² Logically, therefore, 'the miserable poverty of India under British rule' was better solved by 'Indian leaders.'¹³³

Nehru was critical to the ILP and Brockway, who was able to welcome Congress's arguments for Indian independence because they arrived as a profession of Nehruvian socialism. In *The Indian Crisis*, Brockway holds that 'The Indian national congress is undoubtedly the most representative and the most vital of the Indian organisations' because 'under the influence of Mr. Nehru, the present Chairman, the Congress has increasingly become a proletarian movement...demanding not only political freedom, but social and economic freedom as well.'¹³⁴ In turn, Nehru believed that Brockway was 'one of the very few men in the Labour movement in England who can take a broad view and not be too much obsessed by imperialist conceptions.'¹³⁵ He agreed to write for the ILP's journal, *The New Leader*, on 'Swaraj and Socialism' which held that 'capitalism necessarily leads to exploitation of one man by another, one group by another and one country by another. If, therefore, we must be opposed to this imperialism and exploitation, we must also be opposed to capitalism. The only alternative that is offered to us is some form of socialism' and so 'we must fight British dominion in India, not only on nationalistic grounds, but also on social and international grounds.' The democratic socialists of the ILP would have risen to applaud Nehru's reconciliation of self-determination and socialist reform: While much work was still to be done in solving social problems such as caste, Indian independence would help the

¹³¹ Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 179-180.

¹³² Fenner Brockway, *The Indian Crisis* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1930), 39.

¹³³ Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 184.

¹³⁴ Fenner Brockway, *The Indian Crisis* 114.

¹³⁵ Nehru to Rangaswami Iyengar, 7.9.11.1927, SWJN, vol. 2, 331.

‘peasantry, the landless labourers, the workers, the shop-keepers, the artisans’ because these wretched of the Indian earth ‘will be able to bring more pressure to bear on an Indian than on an alien government.’¹³⁶

By 1930 the CIL had reached from the northwest down into the capital and evolved a definite structure, with a Central Branch to co-ordinate local branches, which included Bristol, Southampton, Merseyside and Manchester,¹³⁷ Redfern and Menon became joint secretaries alongside a chairman and treasurer¹³⁸ and a determination to be a ‘fighting body.’¹³⁹

Headquartering the League in London brought advantages, including better access to the press and the House of Commons through sympathetic Labour MPs that the CIL sought to corral into what it called its parliamentary committee.¹⁴⁰ Most importantly, however, was the metropolis itself, the junction-box of empire. As Jonathan Schneer puts it ‘the imperial drumbeat was steady and all-enveloping’ but ‘because London was an imperial metropolis it was cosmopolitan and because it was cosmopolitan it contained anti-imperialists and critics of empire’ which were organised into ‘a dense web of overlapping organisations’ which ‘spoke in a multitude of voices, for there were many anti-imperialisms as well as many imperialisms in London.’¹⁴¹ By the time of the India League’s more active years, this had intensified into what Susheila Nasta calls ‘the radical anti-colonial atmosphere of inter-war London.’¹⁴² It was in London that the alliance between the CIL and the ILP began to develop on the ground, with Menon elected to the London and Southern Counties Divisional Council of the ILP.¹⁴³ Menon was already seen as a star speaker at the ILP’s meetings and was drawn

¹³⁶ ‘Swaraj and Socialism’ originally in the *New Leader* and reprinted in *The Hindu*, 11.8.1928, SWJN, vol. 3, 369.

¹³⁷ Redfern to Eileen Merrie, 21.1.1929 and Redfern to Peter Freeman, 13.1.1929, NMML/KMP/194.

¹³⁸ Redfern to Miss Muriel, 21.1.1929, KMP/NMML/194.

¹³⁹ Redfern to Menon, 1.11.1930, KMMP/NMML/194.

¹⁴⁰ Reginald Sorensen, ‘The India League: A Note by Reginald Sorensen’, 6.9.1945, NMML/KMP/191.

¹⁴¹ Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven, CN and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 162.

¹⁴² Susheila Nasta ‘Negotiating a “New World Order:” Mulk Raj Anand as Public Intellectual in the Heart of Empire 1924-1945’, *South Asian Resistances in Britain 1858-1946*, eds. Sumita Mukherjee and Rehana Ahmed (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 148.

¹⁴³ Fred Howard to Menon, 12.12.1931, NMML/KMP/131.

into the Party's campaign for the release of the Meerut Prisoners, where he would also begin to encounter British communists and trades unionists.¹⁴⁴ In turn, the ILP actively supported CIL meetings and requested Indian speakers at their own conferences because 'an Indian speaker is always preferable at these meetings because the question "have you ever been to India" is automatically forestalled.'¹⁴⁵ A telling request came from the ILP for speakers, 'if possible one a Moslem and one a Hindu. To get two people like this on the same platform would, we think, go a long way to disprove the idea that various sects in India are irreconcilable, at least as far as the question of freedom goes.'¹⁴⁶ The CIL now discovered a key function as an 'intermediary organisation to introduce prominent speakers on India to Labour parties in particular.'¹⁴⁷ This role worked both ways: the CIL relayed a telegram from the 'Women's Indian Association' in Madras to the Secretary of the ILP about 'Daily *Lathi* Charges Men Picketers arrest women picketers destroy peace prospects demand general amnesty repeal ordinances [sic]'¹⁴⁸ and, in turn, an ILP Conference reiterated its support 'of the Congress claim to independence' and asked the CIL for help in sending the resolution to 'the right people in India.'¹⁴⁹ The beginnings of a recognisable politics of friendship and transnational solidarity was gestating, but there would be one last battle with Besant before it could be properly born.

Besant was still writing to the CIL from India, requesting a delegation to attend a meeting of the National Liberal Federation (NLF) which was trying to revive the All-Parties Conference that had drafted the Commonwealth of India Bill, still without Congress. She wrote to the CIL as a party that shared a 'bond of union' with the NLF in their joint campaign for (a

¹⁴⁴ Jack Dallas to Menon, 7.5.31, NMML/KMP/131.

¹⁴⁵ Ernest Baker (Chairman and Propaganda Secretary, ILP) to Doreen Young (Secretary of the CIL), 23.5.1930, KMP/NMML/131.

¹⁴⁶ Arthur S. Souter to Menon 30.9.1931, NMML/KMP/131.

¹⁴⁷ CIL, 'Report on work,' 1928, NMML/KMP/194.

¹⁴⁸ Joint Secretary of the CIL to the Secretary of the ILP, 11.2.1931, NMML/KMP/131.

¹⁴⁹ Fred Howard (Secretary, ILP London & Southern Counties) to 'The Congress Party of India', 25.1.1932, NMML/KMP/191.

limited) ‘dominion status for India.’¹⁵⁰ Her ally in the CIL, Redfern, remained suspicious of Gandhian politics and dismissed the Congress resolution announcing non-cooperation as ‘silly.’¹⁵¹ Graham Pole, meanwhile, was vetoing some of the more radical actions contemplated by Menon.¹⁵² Brockway was frustrated with this pusillanimity, writing to Menon that he felt ‘very strongly that we ought to be exerting our influence more definitely and vigorously.’¹⁵³ He would later write to Redfern stating that ‘I should like to see an organisation agitating about India without the temperamental nervousness of the Commonwealth of India League.’¹⁵⁴ Brockway feared that the CIL was mistrusted by Congress and wanted to form a wholly new organisation but Menon headed him off with a threat of resignation.¹⁵⁵ A few months after Besant’s message about the NLF, a joint letter was issued by various provincial secretaries, including the very active leader of the Bristol branch. This proposed to change the objective of the League from ‘Dominion status for India’ to ‘freedom and self-determination for India.’¹⁵⁶ Freeman objected on the grounds that such a radicalisation would jeopardise the CIL’s ‘influential position both with the public and particularly with Labour MPs and especially the Secretary of State for India.’ Redfern feared that ‘for English people to advocate this is tantamount to seeking to push India out of the commonwealth’ and that, in any case, an independent India would need British members of the services until ‘sufficient of India’s own sons can be trained.’ The counterargument heralded the India League’s later universality, holding that ‘unfortunately dominion status has been interpreted in various ways... We are neither pro-Indian nor pro-English, our *forté* is the freedom of peoples to self-determination.’ On September 1930 the Executive Committee of the League then considered a proposal from the Manchester Branch proposing that ‘Clause 1

¹⁵⁰ Besant to CIL, 5.1.30, NMML/KMP/172.

¹⁵¹ Redfern to W. Barker, 21.1.1929, NMML/KMP/194.

¹⁵² Menon ‘London Letter’ (to the Congress Socialist Party), 13.3.1930, NMML/KMP/558.

¹⁵³ Brockway to Menon, 14.10.1930, NMML/KMP/415.

¹⁵⁴ Brockway to Redfern, 5.12.1931, cited in Janaki Ram, *V.K. Krishna Menon*, 19.

¹⁵⁵ CIL, record of annual meeting, 28.6.1931, NMML/KMP/177.

¹⁵⁶ This letter was from various provincial secretaries of the CIL and addressed to the Members of the CIL, 29.8.1930, NMML/KMP/172

of the constitution be amended: the clause if amended will read “Object: To work for freedom and self-determination for India.”¹⁵⁷ At a meeting of the CIL’s Council on the 6th of September 1930 the League elected to support ‘Congress demands for the right to secede from the empire, control over the defence force and financial questions settled by an international tribunal’ and urged Labour to press the Government to do the same.¹⁵⁸ Thus, the CIL traded theosophical wealth and influence for friendship with the new Congress Party emerging after Gandhi’s march to the sea, Nehru’s hoisting of the tricolour by the Ravi and the Lahore declaration for *purna swaraj*. A month later, the CIL’s Executive Committee duly regretted ‘the resignation of Dr. Besant’¹⁵⁹ but Lansbury remained on the League’s Committee of Action. At the same meeting, however, one Mrs. Faruki and Rameshwari Nehru (a co-founder of the All-India Women’s Conference) joined the League,¹⁶⁰ bringing a greater Indian presence than the lonely Menon. Now that the CIL had ‘openly declared for self-determination and identified itself with Congress policy’¹⁶¹ Brockway joined the Executive Committee. He soon scored the great coup of securing Bertrand Russell as Chairman of the CIL,¹⁶² whom he had met at a meeting for conscientious objectors during the Great War.¹⁶³ Russell would chair the League until the war, though as an increasingly sleepy partner. His motivations for joining the India League were revealed in a 1935 interview, where he was asked what ‘were the most burning questions in England’ to which he replied:

‘Imperialism! I have in the last year, spent a considerable part of my working time at the head of a committee dealing with a comprehensive range of Indian affairs, and it is my hope that India will soon as possible succeed in freeing herself from England’s

¹⁵⁷ The correspondence is in NMML/KPM/194.

¹⁵⁸ CIL ‘Resolutions passed at a Meeting of the Council of the Commonwealth of India League’, 6.10.1930, NMML/KMP/174.

¹⁵⁹ CIL, Minutes of Executive Committee, 18.10.1930, NMML/KMP/174.

¹⁶⁰ India League, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 18.10.1930 (hereafter, IL/EC) and 14.11.1930, NMML/KMP/176.

¹⁶¹ Brockway to Menon, 2.6.1931, NMML/KMP/415.

¹⁶² Secretary’s Report to the Council of the India League 17.1.1932 NMML/KMP/177, Menon to Brockway, 20.6.1931 and Menon to Brockway, n.d. (likely 6.1931), NMML/KMP/415.

¹⁶³ Fenner Brockway, *Towards Tomorrow*, 167.

domination and become a self-governing state – when that has happened, perhaps we will start to come down to earth and correct our own mistakes and prejudices. There is a need to counter appalling economic injustice and horrible moral prejudice.’¹⁶⁴

Russell began writing articles for the *Manchester Guardian* and the League arranged for Labour MPs to meet with Shiva Rao and Congress leaders, including Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sarojini Naidu, and labour leaders such as P.C. Joshi, as cables began arriving from Gandhi and his emissary, Sudhir Gosh. The parliamentary committee was reconstituted after the 1931 Labour rout, with twenty-one members, although it is difficult to establish how many of these remained active ‘Members for India’ along with their other commitments. The India League’s parliamentary committee lacked the formal recognition, timetabling or institutional cohesion of an official House of Commons committee, and it is unclear how often it met as a group. Dozens of Labour MPs consented, however, to join an organ of the India League calling itself a ‘parliamentary committee’ which Tom Williams MP (a future Cabinet Minister) chaired for over a decade. The Executive Committee, meanwhile, now sat Brockway, Frida Laski, Russell, two Labour MPs, Rameshwari Nehru and representatives of the Quakers, pacifists and the ILP.¹⁶⁵ Brockway, Rameshwari Nehru and Horace Alexander sat on the editorial board of the League’s periodical, *Indian News*¹⁶⁶ while Agatha Harrison (a friend and political ally of Gandhi) became a full-time Secretary.¹⁶⁷ The CIL now had organisational form. More importantly, while Redfern and Besant had bemoaned the loss of influence in Britain because of the radicalisation of the League, the new organisation proclaimed proudly that it ‘may now look forward to the confidence of the Indian nationalist movement.’¹⁶⁸ Thus, the CIL’s anticolonialism was in part the product of its network

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Bertrand Russell for ‘Politiken,’ 6.10.1935, in Bertrand Russell, *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, ed. Andrew Bone, 45 Vols (Abingdon: Routledge, 1983-) Vol. 21, 548.

¹⁶⁵ IL/EC, 16.11.1931, NMML/KMP/177.

¹⁶⁶ IL/EC, 14.11.1930, NMML/KMP/176.

¹⁶⁷ IL/EC, 16.11.1931, NMML/KMP/177.

¹⁶⁸ India League, Secretary’s Report to the Council, 17.1.1932, NMML/KMP/177.

realigning from theosophy to the ILP which, in turn, permitted a closer alignment with Congress and its objectives of *purna swaraj*, allowing a triangular politics of friendship between Congress, the Indian League and the British left-wing to begin.

This was helped by the Indian National Congress's move to internationalise itself in the interwar years, 'in part by using the Indian diaspora to produce and disseminate pro-independence propaganda in foreign capitals.'¹⁶⁹ During his visit to Britain, Gandhi attended a party thrown by Brockway for his birthday, where he met Attlee at the head of a group of Labour MPs as well as Russell, Hewlett Johnson (the 'Red Dean' of Canterbury – a consistent supporter of the League) and Naidu. Political friendship was shot through with moments of personal camaraderie: Brockway and Gandhi were both vegetarian and so the meal was mostly fruits and nuts. Gandhi joked that he 'had imposed a hunger strike'¹⁷⁰ on the attendees. The Mahatma also addressed the CIL for 'over an hour and a half...supported its independence, work and urged it to carry out a 'hurricane of propaganda.' Just before this meeting with Gandhi, members of the CIL had quickly moved two resolutions. The first proposed that the 'object of the League be so reworded as to read "to support the claim of India for *Swaraj*' and the second that 'the name of the League be so amended as to read India League.'¹⁷¹ Thus, on the 1st December 1931, two years after Congress made the *purna swaraj* declaration, the constitution of the India League was finalised. On the letterhead of its stationery, the objective 'to secure dominion status thus making her a partner member in the Commonwealth of Great Britain' was simply scratched out and replaced with the handwritten words 'to support the cause of India for *Swaraj*.'¹⁷² The India League later wrote to Congress declaring its support for the party and making much of Gandhi's support for its own work.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ Martin J. Bayly, 'Global Intellectual History in International Relations: Hierarchy, empire and the case of late colonial Indian international thought, *Review of International Studies* 49: 3 (2003), 428-447, 428.

¹⁷⁰ Fenner Brockway, *Towards Tomorrow*, 82.

¹⁷¹ IL/EC, 12.11.1931, NMML/KMP/194.

¹⁷² The improvised constitution is in NMML/KMP/177.

¹⁷³ India League, record of annual meeting, 26.6.1931, NMML/KMP/177.

Despite its cleaving to Congress, the India League stressed that ‘the organisation must be in the main British...with which Mr. Gandhi and other Indian leaders were in agreement.’¹⁷⁴ It could therefore present its discussions of Indian independence as a conversation between the British rather than ‘extremist’ Indian opinion, a wise strategy for the period. IPI was now thoroughly confused: noting that ‘the League is said to be anxious to act as the mouthpiece of the Congress in this country...in some quarters it is thought to be under the influence of Annie Besant and the Theosophical Society.’¹⁷⁵

Towards the Spanish Universality 1930-1938

Throughout the 1930s the India League developed broadening solidarities with suffragists, socialists, pan-Africanists, global anticolonial movements, anti-fascists, antiracists and a category I call ‘the disillusioned of empire’ which later fused into a grand progressive alliance that rose towards the crescendo of the campaign for Republican Spain. The India League was therefore a part of the radical world, expertly revealed by Susan Pennybacker, of expatriate antiracists and exiled anticolonialists forming radical alliances with the British left.¹⁷⁶ Finding unity in a horror of fascism, racism and a disenchantment with exploitative capitalism and conservative social mores, the various components of the radical interwar world increasingly insisted that they were suffering in the same way and fighting the same fight against a common enemy. This politics cannot be measured by the degree of boundary-crossing across the binaries of possessive communities but by the elaboration of a transnational anticolonial, antifascist and progressive universality. While Leela Gandhi’s theorisation of political friendship draws on Derrida, this politics is better explained by

¹⁷⁴ IL/EC, 16.11.1931, NMML/KMP/177.

¹⁷⁵ ENSYR, 24.6.1931, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/356.

¹⁷⁶ Susan Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: race and political culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

drawing on the later work of Derrida's one-time interlocutor, Hans-Georg Gadamer. Darren S. Walhof notes that 'friendship is a recurring theme in Gadamer's later writings'¹⁷⁷ and it plays a key role in 'one of the central tasks of politics' which 'in Gadamer's view is bringing solidarities to awareness.'¹⁷⁸ As the India League participated in the global antifascist campaigns of the 1930s it worked to disclose the solidarities and equivalences between Indian anticolonialism and other progressive movements which, while they remained distinctive, a political 'fusion of horizons,'¹⁷⁹ to borrow from Gadamer's concept, creating the Spanish Universality.

There is a category of India League support which is different from the others: the disillusioned of empire. In 1927, for example, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) sent A.A. Purcell on a mission to India and, upon his return, he joined the India League.¹⁸⁰ Like Hyndman, anticolonialism and friendship with India often Britons to the left, rather than the other way around. For Ben Bradley, it was his experience of working conditions in Rawalpindi that *originally* drove him to communist labour organising and then the India League.¹⁸¹ For Reginald Bridgeman, it was a diplomatic posting to India and what he saw of the empire there that led him to give up his career at the Foreign Office for anticolonialism, the British Section of the League Against Imperialism and its successor, the Colonial Information Bureau.¹⁸² For members of the Fire Brigades Union, it was the experience of training Indian firemen during the war and witnessing the realities of colonial rule that led them to support the India League at TUC and Labour Conferences.¹⁸³ As for Michael Carritt,

¹⁷⁷ Darren Walhof, 'Friendship, Otherness and Gadamer's Politics of Solidarity,' *Political Theory*, 34: 5 (2006), 569-593, 575.

¹⁷⁸ Darren Walhof, 'Friendship, Otherness,' 584.

¹⁷⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013 ed.), 358.

¹⁸⁰ P.S. Gupta, *Imperialism*, 110.

¹⁸¹ Simon Meddick, Elizabeth Payne and Phillip Katz, *Red Lives: Communists and the Struggles for Socialism* (London: Manifesto Press, 2020), 15.

¹⁸² Imanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement* (London: Methuen, 1974), 502.

¹⁸³ Birmingham City Police Criminal Investigative Department X Office, Police Report, 15.1.1944, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

he had been disillusioned by his experiences as a colonial administrator.¹⁸⁴ He witnessed ‘the indiscriminate beating of whole villages...by senior police officers’¹⁸⁵ and was particularly appalled by the jails where he saw ‘emaciated men, like animals, chained to the walls or dragging around an iron ball chained to one ankle; and most foul of all, the bar-fetters where the flesh round the ankles was torn away and bleeding.’ The prisoner in question had not been convicted, merely detained under the Criminal Procedure Code ‘as a person of bad repute unable to prove otherwise...and unable to find surety for good behaviour in the future.’¹⁸⁶ Carritt was naturally inspired by the ‘communist-led trades unions and peasant committees’ which led to an internal struggle ‘with the deep-seated prejudices of my social class and upbringing’ and his transformation into a ‘starry-eyed activist in the Indian independence movement.’ Carritt started by reading the works of ‘Professor Laski and G.D.H. Cole’ to make sense of the duplicity of the un-British empire: that ‘the noble effort was a façade behind which the *Raj* facilitated and encouraged exploitation on an even bigger scale.’¹⁸⁷ He was already breaking the law as these books were banned in India¹⁸⁸ and he further courted prosecution by leaking intelligence material to the Communist Party of India (CPI), warning activists that their cover had been blown. He also moved money between the CPGB and CPI and turned his flat into a safe house for P.C. Joshi. Fearing that the Intelligence Bureau was on his tracks (his official role meant that he saw the intelligence files where, entertainingly, he recognised his own activities) he resigned the ICS for Britain. There, he became involved with Bradley at the LAI and then the India League.

Disillusionment could also be indirect: For Menon’s academic mentor and political supporter, Harold Laski, it was the experience of being a juror on an infamous libel related to the

¹⁸⁴ For Michael Carritt’s conversion and later activities, see Michael Carritt papers in BL/Mss. Eur. D.1172.

¹⁸⁵ Michael Carritt, *A Mole*, 125.

¹⁸⁶ Michael Carritt, *A Mole*, 67.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 126.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 2.

Amritsar massacre that exposed the ugly themes of empire. Menon would later remark that ‘since the days that he sat on a jury in the Michael O’Dwyer Case, Professor Laski became one of us.’¹⁸⁹ While Laski occasionally doubted the immediately practicality of Indian self-government, his verdict on British rule was ‘I hate it and I personally favour our withdrawal from there.’¹⁹⁰ Laski brought with him a network based out of the LSE, including the London University Labour Club, which supported the League at Labour Party conferences.¹⁹¹ The India League’s most active and consistent supporter in Parliament, Reginald Sorensen, had never even been to India. His eyes were opened by ‘an old lady who sometimes distributed leaflets about India’ to his Unitarian congregation. Later, it was Menon’s willingness to ‘speak to a humble group in an obscure Walthamstow Church Hall’ that impressed Sorensen and fully ‘awakened him to the moral significance of India’s cause’¹⁹² leading him to dedicate most of his political career to anticolonialism.

The India League also inherited many connections, arguments and allies from the League Against Imperialism. Mark Reeves has intricately traced these in his chapter in an excellent edited volume on the LAI¹⁹³ so they will not be rehearsed in detail here. It is worth noting that the Brussels Conference’s resolution pledged attendees to fight for the complete independence of India. This was signed by Brockway, Bridgeman, Lansbury and Harry Pollitt of the CPGB.¹⁹⁴ Also present in Brussels was George Padmore, Ellen Wilkinson and S.O. Davies of the Miners Federation. All these figures would attend India League meetings, and some would become active supporters or members of the organisation.¹⁹⁵ Bridgeman was

¹⁸⁹ Cited in Isaac Kramnick and Bary Sheerman, *Harold Laski: A Life on the Left* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993), 223.

¹⁹⁰ Isaac Kramnick and Barry Sheerman, *Harold Laski*, 222.

¹⁹¹ London University Labour Club, Resolution on India, NMML/KMP/143, LP/RAC 1934 and LP/RAC, 1935.

¹⁹² T.J.S. George, *Krishna Menon*, 63.

¹⁹³ Mark Reeves, ‘Two Leagues, One Front? The India League and the League Against Imperialism in the British Left, 1927-1937’, *The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives*, ed. Michelle Louro (Leiden University Press, 2020).

¹⁹⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru ‘Report on the Brussels Conference for the All-India Congress Committee’, 1927, SWJN, 2, 278.

¹⁹⁵ Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism*, 72.

particularly well-connected to Padmore¹⁹⁶ and Padmore to Rajani Palme Dutt, the half-Indian leader of the CPGB and great supporter of the India League. Nancy Cunard was also a supporter of the LAI and the breadth of her activism, including radical antiracist support of the accused in the Scottsboro case, Republican Spain, anticolonialism, pan-Africanism and the India League exemplifies the world of personal connections, radical networks and global horizons that passed between the LAI and the India League and which went on to form the Spanish Universality.¹⁹⁷ Most importantly, after the LAI was wound up in 1937 the mission of its British Section was continued by Bridgeman's Colonial Information Bureau from inside the India League's rooms, where it became a key ally in the League's wartime campaign among the trades union movement.

The India League's entry into British antifascism was helped by two organisations within the country: the ILP and the Socialist League, as well as two organisations based abroad: Comintern and Congress. At its Seventh World Congress, Comintern committed to supporting Popular Fronts against fascism. It is important, at this point, to note Braskén, Copsey and Featherstone's argument that 'all too often anti-fascism is understood a monolith, mainly connected to Stalinism or Soviet communism, which grossly misrepresents the varieties of anti-fascist resistance' This included strong 'intersections between anti-fascism and anti-colonialism/anti-imperialism.'¹⁹⁸ Equally, communism could be influenced by Indian anticolonial thought: in addition to the impact of M.N. Roy upon international communism, the CPGB had circulated the 'Dutt-Bradley' thesis which had been worked out in consultation with Mino Mansani of the Congress Socialist Party and called for Indian Communists to support Congress as part of the United/Popular Front.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Susan Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 68.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹⁸ *Anti-Fascism in a Global Perspective: Transnational Networks, Exile Communities and Radical Internationalism*, eds. Kevin Braskén, Nigel Copsey and David Featherstone (New York: Routledge, 2021), 2.

¹⁹⁹ *Labour Monthly*, 3.1936.

The organisation that brought the India League into the anti-fascist world was neither the ILP nor the CPGB but the Socialist League, led and financed by Cripps. Cripps was a momentous figure in the history of Indian independence and a thoroughgoing anticolonialist in this period, equating imperialism and fascism and condemning European colonialism in Africa.²⁰⁰ While the ILP had brought the India League much, it was now an organisation in decline. Before 1918 it had served as the individual section of a Labour Party where the membership was otherwise through the trades unions. The 1918 constitution and Arthur Henderson's reforms transformed Labour into a socialist one with space for individual membership through affiliated and ward-based parties. This reduced the ILP to a left-wing pressure group and its interwar years were characterised by increasing radicalism under the influence of the red Clydesider, Jimmy Maxton.²⁰¹ This led to declining membership and increasing remoteness from the mainstream Party, culminating in the ILP's disaffiliation in 1931 when even the Labour rump was increasingly intolerant of its waywardness.²⁰² In 1937 Menon wrote in his 'London Letter' for the Congress Socialist Party that the ILP was about to fatally split, infuriating Brockway and leading to a parting of ways.²⁰³ On the other hand, the Socialist League was (for now) both affiliated to Labour and committed to the kind of popular front tactics that the India League needed. The activist intellectuals H.N. Brailsford and J.F. Horrabin were involved with both the India and the Socialist Leagues. Brailsford wrote a pamphlet for the Socialist League about British rule impoverishing in India and criticised the 1935 Government of India Act for enhancing the power of the reactionary princes,²⁰⁴ a view adopted by the wider Socialist League.²⁰⁵ Menon wrote for the party

²⁰⁰ Susan Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro*, 92, see also Stafford Cripps's preface in George Padmore, *Africa and World Peace* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1937), ix-xi.

²⁰¹ Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 42.

²⁰² Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left*, 29.

²⁰³ Brockway to Menon, 31.5.1937, NMML/KMP/142.

²⁰⁴ Michael Bor, *The Socialist League in the 1930s* (London: Athena Press, 2005), 287.

²⁰⁵ Michael Bor, *The Socialist League*, 287.

publication and Socialist Leaguers, including Bevan, Laski and Wilkinson, put India at the front of the organisation's program.²⁰⁶ Crucially, the 1936 Socialist League Conference passed a resolution which 'would give self-determination through a freely elected Indian Constituent Assembly, to annul restrictive penal laws, release political prisoners, ensure free speech and assembly, encourage organisation of workers and peasants to take an effective part in the Constituent Assembly.'²⁰⁷ The Socialist League also provided opportunities for political collaboration with India: Nehru wrote for the *Socialist* and in October 1935 Masani spoke at Caxton Hall under the invitation of the Socialist League. He denounced the situation in India, with 'the Press gagged, unions suppressed, indefinite imprisonment in concentration camps without trial (for over 2,000 Bengalis) and a form of martial law in several districts.'²⁰⁸ By 1936 Menon was the official representative of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in London and was forwarding CSP literature to the Worker's Educational Association.²⁰⁹ The CSP began raising funds for the India League, which brokered a meeting between Pushottamdas Tricumdas and various Labour figures including Herbert Morrison and James Middleton, the General Secretary of the Labour Party.²¹⁰

The India League's fusion of anticolonialism and antifascism worked because of its insistence that fascism and imperialism were the same. In July of 1938 a mass demonstration in favour of Republican Spain included an Indian contingent led by Nehru and Menon carrying Indian flags. Nehru's speech declared that British rule in India was fascist because it 'was imperialist and that enclosed fascism.'²¹¹ As Michelle Louro has shown, parts of Congress viewed anti-imperialism and anti-fascism as natural allies resisting 'manifestations of capitalist

²⁰⁶ Suhash Chakravarty, *V.K. Krishna Menon and the India League 1924-1947*, 2 Vols, (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1997), Vol 2, 309.

²⁰⁷ Michael Bor, *The Socialist League*, 289.

²⁰⁸ Michael Bor, *The Socialist League*, 288.

²⁰⁹ Menon to Ashok Mehta, 29.12.1936, NMML/KMP/142.

²¹⁰ Mino Masani to Menon, 4.6.1934, NMML/KMP/142.

²¹¹ ENSYR, 27.7.1938, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/293.

exploitation worldwide.’²¹² Nehru revitalised Congress’s Foreign Department which issued a newsletter directly comparing Republican Spain with India.²¹³ While existing work has rightly focused on Nehru’s contribution to forging alliances between antifascism and anticolonialism²¹⁴ it was the India League that did the hard legwork of building up the antifascist-anticolonial alliance in Britain. Menon, a Labour Councillor for St. Pancras, had campaigned to prevent the British Union of Fascists from marching from Kentish Town to Trafalgar Square²¹⁵ and demonstrated against ‘the actions of the local council in permitting the German Nazi Party in London to hold meetings in Seymour Hall, Marylebone.’²¹⁶ In turn, John Strachey of the Anti-Fascist Coordinating Council spoke at India League meetings.²¹⁷

An important ally in the antifascist alliance was the interwar feminist movement.

Rameshwari Nehru presided over a women’s committee of the India League which held meetings alongside the Women’s Cooperative Guild.²¹⁸ These meetings attracted feminists such as Margaret Corbett Ashby, Maude Royden, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, Vera Antsey, Rosalind Moore and Sylvia Pankhurst.²¹⁹ Many of these were also active in the ILP, Labour and the campaign for Spain. Ellen Wilkinson travelled to Spain and then to India with an India League delegation in 1932. The feminist-anticolonial-antifascist fusion is best demonstrated by Ashby and Pankhurst. Ashby was a consistent supporter of the India League and president of the International Alliance of Women which was ‘the first international organisation to condemn Fascism.’²²⁰ In her youth, Pankhurst knew Naoroji, who ‘had been a

²¹² Michelle Louro, ‘Anti-Fascism and Anti-Imperialism Between the World Wars: The perspective from India’, *Anti-Fascism in a Global Perspective: Transnational Networks, Exile Communities and Radical Internationalism*, eds. Kevin Braskén, Nigel Copley and David Featherstone (New York: Routledge, 2021).

²¹³ Michelle Louro, *Comrades Against Imperialism*, 214.

²¹⁴ See Michelle Louro, ‘Anti-Fascism and Anti-Imperialism’.

²¹⁵ ENSYR, 14.7.1937, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

²¹⁶ ENSYR, 6.4.1938, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

²¹⁷ ENSYR, 7.4.1937, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/450.

²¹⁸ See NMML/KMP/396 and *Manchester Guardian*, 6.5.193.

²¹⁹ See NMML/KMP/396.

²²⁰ Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 196.

frequent habitué of her mother's salons'²²¹ and had read *Poverty and Un-British Rule* at the age of nineteen. She had read Hardie on India and knew Rajani and Clemens Palme Dutt as well as Dhanvanthi Ramu Rau (founder of the Women's Indian Association) and Sarojini Naidu. Pankhurst even authored a book on India that drew on Naoroji to criticise the revenue and land tenure systems.²²² It also attacked the halting progress of constitutional reform and predicted that Indian women would prefer self-government to the alleged 'good government'²²³ of empire. Naturally, she spoke frequently at India league meetings, sharing a stage with Rameshwari Nehru.²²⁴ By 1933 Pankhurst was comparing Hitler's methods to British rule in the North West Frontier Province.²²⁵ Her fierce opposition to Franco and the Italian conquest of Abyssinia was expressed by her efforts to ally 'the India League, the League of Coloured Peoples, the African Service Bureau the Negro Welfare Association and the Kenya Association'²²⁶ and thereby work towards the fusion of political horizons which was the Spanish Universality.

With these connections, India League meetings were becoming increasingly diverse. An example platform from 1938 might include William Mellor (editor of *Tribune*), Ted Willis (a left-wing playwright, novelist and screenwriter), Monica Whately (a suffragist and Labour politician), Douglas Frank Springhall (Commissar of the Fifteenth International Brigade), Yusuf Mehrally (a future socialist Mayor of Bombay, political prisoner and coiner of the phrase 'Simon Go Back') and pan-Africanists including CLR James, T. Ras Makonnen, George Padmore and Jomo Kenyatta.²²⁷ Padmore had met Nehru at the LAI in Brussels and was close to both Sorensen and Brockway.²²⁸ Although he was suspicious of the 'bourgeois'

²²¹ Rachel Holmes, *Sylvia Pankhurst: Natural Born Rebel* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 620.

²²² Sylvia Pankhurst, *India and the Earthly Paradise* (Bombay: Sunshine Publishing House, 1926), 280.

²²³ Sylvia Pankhurst, *India*, 280.

²²⁴ ENSYR, 2.3.1934, BL/IOR/L/PJ/448.

²²⁵ Rachel Holmes, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, 660, see also the Pankhurst-edited periodical, *Ethiopian Times and Orient Review*.

²²⁶ Rachel Holmes, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, 698.

²²⁷ ENSYR, 15.6.1938, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/451.

²²⁸ See Imanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement*, 346-355.

Congress he held Nehru in high regard and developed a warmth for Menon.²²⁹ The India League and the pan-Africanists shared some beliefs and strategies. The India League made much of scandals like Amritsar and the electoral victories of Congress, while the pan-Africanists made political capital out of anticolonial disturbances in Trinidad and elsewhere. Like Menon, Padmore believed that the European working class needed the support of their colonised brethren to win emancipation.²³⁰ The pan-Africanists had been seeking the support of the British left for much longer than the India League – since the first Pan-African conference of 1900²³¹ but T. Ras Makonnen, when contemplating the founding of the International African Service Bureau (IASB), took note of the India League.²³² The IASB declared that ‘It is the business of the Intellectuals of African descent to work in the closest harmony with the East Indians, to make the cause of the Indian working masses their own and to strive for unity of action between these two racial groups so closely allied by a common poverty.’²³³ The pan-Africanists, IASB and India League shared the fusional language of anticolonial antifascism: Padmore’s *Negro Worker* had declared the Union of South Africa to be ‘one of the most classical colonies of fascism’ and had condemned both the Meerut trials and the RAF’s bombing campaigns in India.²³⁴ Padmore and Kenyatta even coauthored an essay for the *New Leader* which stated ‘the truth is that four-fifths of the British Empire is as much a dictatorship as the Fascist countries.’²³⁵ The India League campaigned against fascist aggression in Abyssinia, a cause perfectly suited to the emerging anticolonial-antifascist fusion. This campaign drew in British India League supporters like Cripps, Dutt, Sorensen, Wilkinson as well as antiracists both British (Dr. Harold Moody) and

²²⁹ James R. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary: George Padmore’s path from Communism to Pan-Africanism*, (London and New York: Praeger, 1967), 47.

²³⁰ Susan Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro*, 89.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

²³² T. Ras Makonnen *Pan-Africanism from Within as recorded and edited by Kenneth King*, ed. Kenneth King (London and Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1973), 117.

²³³ ‘Editorial: An Open Letter to West Indian Intellectuals,’ *International African Opinion*, (1939) 1, cited in Susan Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro*, 100.

²³⁴ Cited in Susan Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro* 78.

²³⁵ *New Leader*, 29.4.1938, cited in Susan Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro*, 96.

from further afield, including Paul Robeson.²³⁶ Paul Gilroy notes the insistence by pan-Africanists, including W.E.B. Du Bois, that the African-American struggle against the racist counter-revolution in the American South was part of a *global* conflict, taking in Asia and elsewhere.²³⁷ Robeson brings this out clearly: his own radicalisation was helped along by his encounters with Saklatvala and he, in turn, provided support for the India League in the late thirties, bringing with him his own radical network of cultural and political figures – he shared his London flat with Kenyatta.²³⁸ This demonstrates an important aspect of the fusional quality of the period: the insistence that American racism, and British imperialism were the *same problem* enabled a countervailing politics of friendship, solidarity and antiracist universality: at an India League meeting Paul Robeson declared that ‘leaders like Nehru demonstrated to the world that coloured people were not a backward race.’²³⁹

Robeson, along with other supporters and members of the India League (including a future leader of the Labour Party, Michael Foot²⁴⁰) were also involved in the China Campaign Committee (CCC). This lobbied and raised relief funds for China’s struggle against Japanese imperialism. Madam Sun Yat-Sen had supported the LAI at Brussels and Nehru, Padmore and others had closely followed developments in China.²⁴¹ The national organizer of the China Campaign Committee, Arthur Clegg, remembered Menon as a ‘loyal supporter of the CCC’ who ‘spoke for us on many occasions.’ He was a ‘passionate speaker’ who ‘brought the greetings of the Indian National Congress’ to China and would finish his orations ‘exhausted and sweating.’²⁴² Returning to Gadamer, Walhof notes his insistence that ‘solidarity ought to be based on an understanding that others suffer in the way that we do’²⁴³ This was not based

²³⁶ Michael Ortiz, *Anti-Colonialism and the Crises of Interwar Fascism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 33-4.

²³⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 125-126.

²³⁸ Susan Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro*, 71.

²³⁹ IPI, ‘Memorandum on India League Reception for Nehru at Kingsway Hall’ 27.6.1938, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/293.

²⁴⁰ Arthur Clegg, *Aid China 1937-1949* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2003), 19.

²⁴¹ Susan Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro*, 91.

²⁴² Arthur Clegg, *Aid China*, 27.

²⁴³ Darren R. Walhof ‘Friendship, Otherness’, 573.

on ‘characteristics like race or ethnicity, gender, religion or sexual orientation’ but on ‘reciprocal co-perception.’²⁴⁴ The IASB had made the co-perception of the ‘common poverty’ of Indians and Africans clear, and the India League did the same for China. In 1937 Menon and Laski addressed a meeting of nearly 1,200 including (in the words of Scotland Yard) ‘200 Chinese and 50 other Orientals’ where Menon declared that ‘China was undergoing the fate of India, namely imperialistic penetration.’²⁴⁵ This solidarity was durable: as late as 1942 Menon was demanding that ‘India be allowed a national government and membership in the United Nations as the only way in which it could carry out its pledges, so often repeated by Nehru, to aid China.’²⁴⁶ In London, the two organisations walked the same streets, conducting protest marches from Trafalgar square towards Camden.²⁴⁷ Michael Dugdale MP would serve on the committees of both organisations²⁴⁸ and, by 1937, they were linked by the China-India Committee, an ‘off-shoot of the India League’²⁴⁹ which organised a musical performance by Uday Shankar in aid of China. Menon managed to successfully invite Robeson, Bronislaw Malinowski and the Afghan ambassador (the British were fighting in Waziristan – another example of co-perception, perhaps) to hear Shankar perform.²⁵⁰

As we have seen, Spain led Pankhurst towards fusion-making and the CCC was the same: insisting that ‘the issue of Spain and the issue of China were one and the same.’²⁵¹ From India, Congress ‘condemned fascism in Spain, expressed solidarity with the Republicans, and raised funds for good and medical assistance for the Spanish cause.’²⁵² In the *Congress Socialist*, Mulk Raj Anand drew comparisons between the Spanish peasants under Franco and

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 585.

²⁴⁵ ENSYR, 6.10.1937, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

²⁴⁶ Arthur Clegg, *Aid China*, 147.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 59.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 151 and Alexander Sloan to Michael Dugdale, 20.10.1944, NMML/KMP/189.

²⁴⁹ Arthur Clegg, *Aid China*, 21.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 21.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 22.

²⁵² Michelle Louro, *Comrades Against Imperialism*, 214.

Indian peasants under the British.²⁵³ Menon had already marched through Kentish Town in aid of Republican Spain²⁵⁴ and in 1937 the India League spun off an India-Spain Committee.²⁵⁵ An appeal was made in the *Manchester Guardian* for Indians to mobilise ‘material support for the Spanish Republic’ with an appeal for ‘food grains, oil, cotton’ and other material for Spain²⁵⁶ and ‘the Spain-India Committee...organised shipments to republicans and international brigadiers.’²⁵⁷ This made the India League part of ‘the biggest moment of international solidarity in British history’ alongside ‘the greater part of one million political and trades union activists.’²⁵⁸ The ILP threw itself into the fight, raising money, an international brigade and an ambulance²⁵⁹ while Labour decisively rejected Britain’s policy of non-intervention in Spain. Spain imposed a moral imperative and a shared emotional language: Cecil Day Lewis’s poem evoked the English volunteer coming to Spain ‘because our open eyes could see no other way. There was no other way to keep man’s flickering truth alight.’²⁶⁰ Nehru had also written that there was ‘a light here, the light of courage and determination and of doing something worthwhile’²⁶¹ in Spain. George Orwell wrote that he joined ‘the militia almost immediately because at that time and in that atmosphere, it seemed the only conceivable thing to do.’²⁶² Although he experienced a disillusionment there, Orwell provides us with the reason that Spain meant so much to the left at that time:

²⁵³ Susheila Nasta ‘Negotiating’, 152.

²⁵⁴ ENSYR, 20.4.1938, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

²⁵⁵ IPI, note on Vengali Krishnan Krishna Menon, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

²⁵⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 20.12.1938.

²⁵⁷ Michelle Louro, ‘Anti-Fascism and Anti-Imperialism’, 122.

²⁵⁸ Nigel Copley ‘Every time they made a Communist, they made a Fascist’: The Labour Party and Popular Anti-Fascism in the 1930s’, *Varieties of Anti-Fascism: Britain in the Inter-War Period*, ed. Nigel Copley and Andrzej Olechnowicz (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 53.

²⁵⁹ Fenner Brockway, *Towards Tomorrow*, 119.

²⁶⁰ Cecil Day Lewis, *The Complete Poems of C. Day Lewis*, ed. Jill Balcon (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 289.

²⁶¹ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Autobiography* (London: The Bodley Head, 1936), 358.

²⁶² George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Vintage, 2021 ed.), 7.

For years past the so-called democratic countries had been surrendering to Fascism at every step. The Japanese had been allowed to do as they liked in Manchuria. Hitler had walked into power and proceeded to massacre political opponents of all shades. Mussolini had bombed the Abyssinians while fifty-three nations...made pious noises ...but when Franco tried to overthrow a mildly Left-wing Government the Spanish people, against all expectation, had risen against him. It seemed – possibly it was – the turning of the tide.²⁶³

According to Hugo Garcia, because of the ‘political grammar’ of anti-fascism ‘the Spanish metaphor was easy to translate into other languages and resonate with various projects of emancipation’ thus ‘framing the war as a universal issue.’²⁶⁴ In Britain, the universality of Spain was organisationally expressed by the Unity Campaign and its successor, the Popular Front, both of which sought to unite communists and non-communists against fascism. Brockway recalled how ‘the idea of the Unity Campaign grew from the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.’²⁶⁵ A classic tactic was the use of pageants of England’s radical heroes, including ‘Wat Tyler, John Ball, the Peterloo victims, James Connolly, Levellers, Tolpuddle Martyrs, Robert Owen, the Chartists, Keir Hardie and William Morris.’²⁶⁶ The India League produced its own fusional protest iconography to match this: On the 30th of January 1938 it organised a 1,200-strong contingent of protestors in Mornington Crescent ‘for the avowed purpose of ‘celebrating Indian Independence Day and demonstrating solidarity with the Indian, Chinese and Spanish people.’ As it marched towards Trafalgar Square it was joined by another 450 people. The procession carried ‘Flags of the Spanish Republic, Irish Republic, Indian National Congress, Sama Samaj Party and banners with portraits of [Subhas Chandra]

²⁶³ George Orwell, *Homage*, 38 .

²⁶⁴ Hugo Garcia, ‘World Capital of Anti-Fascism: The making – and breaking – of a global left in Spain 1936-1939’, *Anti-Fascism in a Global Perspective*, 240.

²⁶⁵ Fenner Brockway, *Towards Tomorrow*, 315.

²⁶⁶ Thomas Linehan ‘Communist Culture and Anti-Fascism in Inter-War Britain’, *Varieties of Anti-Fascism*, 45.

Bose, Nehru, Gandhi, Tagore.’ The following meeting in Trafalgar square expressed ‘solidarity with the Indian workers in their fight for self-government’²⁶⁷ and was addressed by British socialists, the Caribbean communist and civil rights activist Peter Blackman and the Ceylonese nationalist Dr. Wickeramsinghe.

Walhof draws attention to an important political implication of Gadamer’s solidarity: through the ‘forging of a common language about something that is common to us...something comes into being that had not existed before and exists from now on...Something emerges that is contained in neither of the partners alone.’²⁶⁸ Something new was being called into being at the ‘Peace and Empire Conferences’ held by the India League in the summer of 1938. As the various languages of socialism, anticolonialism and antifascism interacted, they found a fusion of political horizons. With 2,000 attendees the June 27th meeting at Kingsway Hall was full, necessitating a ‘duplicate meeting’ for a further 1,000 at St. Pancras Hall. The first meeting was addressed by Nehru, Wilkinson, Hewlett Johnson, David Grenfell, Laski, Dutt, Robeson, Victor Gollancz, Corbett Ashby and H.A. Elvin, chairman of the TUC. Also on the platform was Yusuf Mehrally, Bridgeman, Ronald Kidd (the founder of the National Council of Civil Liberties) and Labour’s General Secretary, James Middleton. Menon read out messages of greeting from individuals and organisations as diverse as the Duchess of Athol, the Imam of Woking, Bertrand Russell, Julian Huxley, Sidney Webb and the Cyprus Autonomy League. IPI commented on ‘how friendly the attitude of the English people present was towards Indian aspirations.’ Laski began with the fusional claim that ‘the emancipation of India would strike a blow for the freedom of the working classes in England, and thus for the freedom of the working classes throughout the whole world.’ Robeson ‘welcomed Nehru on behalf of Black America, Africa and other parts of the world which had

²⁶⁷ ENSYR, 21.9.1938, BL/IOR/L/PJ/451.

²⁶⁸ Darren Walhof, ‘Friendship, Otherness’, 580.

a fellow feeling for the suffering of India.’ He dwelt on repression and trouble in Spain, China, the West Indies, Abyssinia and Ireland and said the ‘Indian people must not allow themselves to be talked out of their heritage.’ Nehru then argued that if the rise of European fascism was shocking the audience ‘they should have been shocked long ago at what happened in India’²⁶⁹ and compared the bombing of Barcelona by fascist Italy and Nazi Germany to British aerial policing of the Northwest Frontier Province of India.

A second ‘Peace and Empire’ conference was convened by the India League in July at Friends House. This demonstrated a powerful anticolonial transnationality as well as the Spanish Universality. It drew an audience of 1,500 and the speakers included Nehru, Menon, Cripps, Wilkinson, Robeson, Sorensen, Leonard Barnes (Labour’s ‘colonial expert’) and Wang Lixi, a dissident Chinese writer and campaigner against Japanese aggression in Manchuria. In the audience were many British Indians, including Dutt, P.B. Seal and Dr. C.B. Vakil. Also present were Lazarus, Peter Blackman (representing the Negro Welfare Association), J.T. Harrison (Left Book Club), Rajani Patel (an Indian lawyer who had been part of the Swadeshi movement), Emil Fauré (Ligue de Défence de la Race Nègre – there to represent the French African colonies), Dr. Harold Moody, S.R. Mohan (Indian Students’ Society), Dr Hugget (Independent Labour Party), Jomo Kenyatta, T. Ras Makonnen and George Padmore. The Credentials Committee of the meeting entered the details of 613 delegates representing 292 organisations, including 68 Labour organisations and ranging from the Abyssinia Association, the Cyprus Autonomy League, The Socialist Party of Ceylon and the Arab Centre to the Amalgamated Society of Wood-Cutting Machinists.²⁷⁰ Nehru asked this audience whether they could ‘distinguish between empire and fascism?’ Cripps asserted that ‘there are some people who are inclined to regard fascism as a new political

²⁶⁹ IPI, ‘Memorandum on India League Reception for Nehru at Kingsway Hall’, 27.6.1938, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/293.

²⁷⁰ NMML/KMP/423.

factor but let me tell you it is as old as Empire itself.’ It was not an Indian that made the clearest comparison between imperialism and fascism, but Kenyatta, who offered the stinging rebuke that equated the anticipatory fear of the fascist future with the history of British imperialism in India:

Most of my people are still living under fascist rule. To you British people...I would say this – clean your own doorstep first. Instead of you people going to the German embassy, I would like to see you march to the India Office and protest against the oppression of that people...

The Conference resolution, moved by Nehru after a tussle with the ILP over collective security, blamed war on the existence of ‘monopoly imperialisms, especially British imperialisms’ and ‘welcomed the increasingly active role played by the Indian National Congress in international affairs’ and noted ‘with satisfaction the Congress declaration that the people of India are ready to co-operate with other people in defence of peace and collective security.’ The meeting extended its solidarity to the people of China, Abyssinia, Spain and Czechoslovakia, holding ‘that in fighting for their national freedom they are fighting for all oppressed and subject peoples.’²⁷¹ The organisations that came together did not disappear into one: it was a friendship in Gadamer’s sense of ‘perceiving that which binds us together entails perceiving the distinctiveness of the other’²⁷² that still permitted a fusion of political horizons. In the late 1930s it was plausible to claim that the struggle for socialism, suffragism, antifascism, anticolonialism and antiracism was *the same struggle*, posited against a common enemy of imperialism, fascism and capitalism, alongside a disenchantment, perhaps, with British liberalism in the doldrums of national governments, non-

²⁷¹ ENSYR, 27.7.1938, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/293.

²⁷² Darren Walhof, ‘Friendship, Otherness,’ 586.

intervention and appeasement. Examining the antifascist-anticolonial alliance through Gadamer reveals the universality of its politics, achieved through the radical positing of a general category of the oppressed that unified even as its parts remained distinct. Thus, the India League's anticolonialism cannot it be understood in isolation from the broad progressive movements it participated in and helped produce: a powerful anticolonial transnationality and a progressive, insurgent, universality.

The India League and the Labour Movement 1938-1945

While Subhas Chandra Bose might criticise Nehru for his 'championing lost causes all the time,'²⁷³ Bose's hard realism – the courting of Britain's powerful enemies – eventually came to little while the idealism of internationalism, anti-fascism and solidarity brought concrete results for the India League and Nehru. On the 18th of January 1937 the Socialist League, ILP and CPGB issued the *Unity Manifesto* which contained a pledge to Indian independence. This was signed by India Leaguers and others including Aneurin Bevan, Brockway, Laski, Palme Dutt, Harry Pollitt and the leaders of two powerful trades unions: Arthur Horner of the Miners and Jack Tanner of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. This is crucial as those two unions would provide key support to the India League during the War.²⁷⁴ Even Owen concedes that 'by the middle of 1939, Menon was the leading figure in anti-imperialist politics in London. Support for Indian independence struggle probably peaked in the summer of 1938, when Nehru addressed a packed Albert Hall on "Peace and Empire" with Menon at

²⁷³ Subhas Chandra Bose to Nehru, 28.3.1939, *Netaji Subhas Bose: Collected Works*, eds. Sisir Kumar Bose and Sugata Bose 12 Vols (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980-2021), vol. 9, 193.

²⁷⁴ Michael Bor, *The Socialist League*, 361.

his side.²⁷⁵ In 1938, at the height of the anti-fascist campaign, some 77% of Britons thought that India should be given independence, 26% during the war and 51% after.²⁷⁶

The common denominator of India League supporters after these years was not Indian, nor communist, but antifascist. Nearly every notable supporter of the India League had visited Spain and the Spanish campaign also provided a space where Labour's leadership mixed with the radical left, providing a route for the India League's network to reach the Party's leadership. Attlee had visited Spain with Wilkinson where he raised a clenched-fist salute to the Spanish Republic and 'told the volunteers that the British Labour Party was behind them in their fight for democracy.'²⁷⁷ Attlee was even willing to share (along with his future Secretary of State for India, Lord Listowel²⁷⁸) 'platforms with Communists on the issue of Spain.'²⁷⁹ Even though Labour had officially rejected United/Popular Fronts as vehicles of communist influence, Spain forged powerful, anti-fascist solidarities and connections with Labour that the India League drew strength from. At a Conference held in Transport House, drawing some 180 delegates from various parts of the Labour movement, Foot, Menon and George Strauss MP called for the Labour movement to realise 'that it was just as important to fight against fascist methods of British imperialism in the colonies as it was to fight against fascism in Spain.'²⁸⁰

At the height of the Spanish Universality, the India League helped broker a secret meeting at Goodfellows, Cripps's country house in the Oxfordshire village of Filkins. At the meeting where Attlee, Barnes, Bevan, Cripps, Richard Crossman, Nehru and Menon. Many of the attendees had been supporters of the Popular Front and involved with its supporting

²⁷⁵ Nicholas Owen, *The British Left and India*, 265.

²⁷⁶ *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, (Gallup, 1938).

²⁷⁷ John Bew, *Citizen Clem: A Biography of Attlee* (London: Riverun, 2016), 216.

²⁷⁸ Arthur Clegg, *Aid China*, 23.

²⁷⁹ Nigel Copsey, 'The Labour Party and Popular Anti-Fascism', *Varieties of Anti-Fascism*, 63.

²⁸⁰ ENSYR 16.1.1937 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/450.

newspaper, *Tribune*. At Goodfellows, Menon, Nehru and the Labour leaders agreed the terms of Indian independence through summoning of a Constituent Assembly for India, an anticolonial idea that the India League had been campaigning for since 1932. Cripps, assisted by Attlee and India League pressure, would then lobby for the Assembly as policy and symbol of Indian independence until it became a key offering of the 1942 Cripps Mission and the policy of the 1945 Labour government. During the war, therefore, there were two strands to Indian anticolonialism within the British left: the first was the India League's advanced and radical position, articulated via rebellious Labour MPs, activists, the CPGB and sympathetic trades unions. The second was the more moderate initiative for an Indian Constituent Assembly, led by Attlee and Cripps from within the wartime coalition. These two interacted through Menon's enduring connection with Cripps and India League pressure within Labour, including its campaign to speed Cripps on his Mission to India. They also remained distinctive, however: Attlee and Cripps had to contend with Churchillian diehardism and Attlee was clearly unhappy about Congress's rejection of the antifascist war and would be appalled by the Quit India Movement. The India League's anticolonial radicalism was always going to be too strong for a British Deputy Prime Minister for whom it could never be politic to publicly reject the imperial project in India. The fourth chapter examines the Attlee-Cripps/Constituent Assembly strand, while the focus here remains on the India League's wider and more radical anticolonial campaign.

In 1939 Nehru's policy of supporting the anti-fascist war in exchange for Indian independence was accepted by Congress's Working Committee over Gandhi and Bose's alternatives, though that agreement was fragile and would not survive the Viceroy's declaration of war on India's behalf.²⁸¹ The new President of Congress, Bose, was no natural

²⁸¹ Johannes H. Voigt 'Co-operation or Confrontation? War and Congress Politics, 1939-42', *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle 1917-1948*, ed. D.A. Low (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 352.

ally of the India League. After Gandhi ousted Bose, however, the Congress Party began ‘sending Krishna Menon news about Congress activities’ and ‘routed its attempts at creating awareness of itself in England through the India League.’²⁸² Attlee and Arthur Greenwood issued a formal statement that ‘the declarations of the British Labour Party on the right of the Indian people to manage their own affairs have been clear and emphatic.’²⁸³ Despite the shadows of war, therefore, the India League might have felt confident about the Labour-Congress alliance inaugurated at Goodfellows. By 1940, however, serious problems were emerging. Labour had endorsed Churchill’s unacceptable ‘August Offer’ and their frontbenchers were no longer invited to League meetings as they had ‘let down India very badly.’²⁸⁴ Conversely, Menon’s requests for Congress to go slow on criticising the war were also ignored²⁸⁵ and Nehru wrote to Menon accusing Labour of ‘following the imperialist line.’²⁸⁶ As late as 1941, Menon was appealing for India to side with China and Russia against fascism, even though that meant cooperating with Britain. Nehru refused.²⁸⁷ In 1940 Menon was clearly terrified about the outbreak of civil disobedience in India and asked Nehru for any indication of Gandhi’s intentions. Nehru warned Menon that the apparent calm was misleading. Menon saw Attlee in September 1940 and ‘conveyed [the] full gravity of [the] imminence of civil disobedience.’ Attlee was unperturbed, stating that he was ‘satisfied with government policy’ and ‘expressed disapproval of Congress.’²⁸⁸ He declared that his views were best expressed by a speech by Wedgwood Benn in the House of Commons which supported the independence of India, but maintained that it was impossible during the war.²⁸⁹ Menon was despondent, telling Cripps that ‘practically none of the Labour Party were

²⁸² Janaki Ram, V.K. *Krishna Menon*, 59.

²⁸³ Statement by Attlee and Greenwood, (specific date unclear) 10.1939, PHM/LPA/JD/IND/1/72 vi.

²⁸⁴ IPI to Silver 17.1.40 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

²⁸⁵ Nehru to Menon, 29.7.1940, SWJN, 11, 96.

²⁸⁶ Nehru to Menon, 8.9.1940, SWJN, 11, 134.

²⁸⁷ Menon to Nehru, 16.12.1941, SWJN, 11, 32.

²⁸⁸ From a ‘gist’ of telegrams from Menon to Nehru and Nehru to Menon enclosed in a ‘Decipher of Telegram, Governor-General to Secretary of State for India’, 14.9.1940, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/453.

²⁸⁹ See HC Deb 18.4.1940, vol. 359, col. 1176.

prepared to support the Congress attitude.²⁹⁰ Moreover, the heady collaboration with the far left during the Spanish years was exacting its price: Cripps' three-year expulsion from Labour begun in 1939 and Menon was soon to be out in the cold as well. In July 1939 he had been selected as the prospective parliamentary candidate by the Dundee Trades Council and Labour Party,²⁹¹ drawing most of his support from the local Jute and Flax Union.²⁹² Now, his pacifism and associations with the Communist Party led Dundee to terminate his candidature. The National Executive of the Labour Party, after an inquiry, found that the procedure taken was incorrect. It recognised Menon as 'a representative of an important section of public opinion' but noted that the Labour Party 'exacts a degree of loyalty and discipline' from its members and stated its confidence that Menon's 'natural allegiance to India' meant that he could not give 'full support to Labour Party policy.' It was claimed that this decision did not 'whittle down in any way its own key desire for the welfare of India.'²⁹³ Menon's reply castigated these equivocations and accused the Executive of introducing a 'national and racial bar into the Labour movement'²⁹⁴ as he resigned his membership of the party. This may have been a mistake as Middleton had grave misgivings about the procedure used, as did the Society of Labour Candidates. Middleton believed that, had the situation been a little different, 'Krishna could again undertake his candidature.'²⁹⁵ His hopes were probably misplaced, however. IPI noted that 'British socialists who formerly supported Indian autonomy are not too pleased with the Indian National Congress's attitude of passive opposition to the war effort.'²⁹⁶ Meanwhile, only one solitary voice mentioned India at the 1940 Labour Party Conference, and no resolution was tabled.²⁹⁷ More broadly, in the months

²⁹⁰ Cripps, diary entry, 1.5.1940, manuscript diary, (hereafter, MD) Mss.9661, Bodleian Library Special Collections, University of Oxford (hereafter, BLSC).

²⁹¹ *Daily Worker*, 14.6.1939.

²⁹² IPI to Silver, 2.5.40, BL/IOR/PJ/12/450.

²⁹³ G.R. Shephard to Menon, 19.11.1940, NMML/KMP/152.

²⁹⁴ Menon to Middleton, 23.12.1940, NMML/KMP/152.

²⁹⁵ Middleton to Sorensen, 18.4.1941, Reginald Sorensen Papers, Parliamentary Archives, SP/SOR35 (Hereafter PA/RSP).

²⁹⁶ ENSYR, 16.10.1940, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/453.

²⁹⁷ LP/RAC, 1940.

and years after the Soviet invasion of Finland and Poland, the League was, in IPI's words, struggling to attract a Labour speaker who 'will stress Indian independence as against Dominion status and who are not averse from occupying seats at the present juncture on the same platform as supporters of Stalin.'²⁹⁸ It is worth noting, however, that Labour's membership of Churchill's government was producing anger and confusion far beyond India. In the House of Commons Ellen Wilkinson spoke of Labour MPs having their

'work cut out to convince our own people in this country that a Government like this can fight for democracy... when this Government has done so much to back up the leaders of Fascism and Nazism. We have had to tell the great industrial areas to forget the Government and to think about the country and realise we are fighting for our very lives and the lives of a great many others too.'²⁹⁹

If Labour felt that they owed a greater loyalty to the national war than their natural constituents in the industrial areas of Britain, then the party's wartime tergiversations on India appear less surprising.

Despite a rift with Labour, the India League maintained a degree of institutional strength, with a chairman, Bertrand Russell, a Vice-Chairman, David Grenfell MP and with Williams and Sorensen leading the parliamentary committee. There was a secretariat, responsible for finance and literature, with both British and Indian members. The Executive Committee included three Labour MPs, Commander Edgar Young, P.C. Bhandari (a British Indian doctor), Menon, Bridgeman and the remarkable Parsi anticolonial and feminist activist, Bhicoo Batlivala.³⁰⁰ League meetings were still attracting prominent speakers, and it

²⁹⁸ IPI to Silver, 17.1.40, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

²⁹⁹ HC Deb, 18.4.1940, vol. 359 col. 1216.

³⁰⁰ ENSYR, 5.8.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/454.

remained allied with other organisations. To take one example, the League held a meeting in 1941 with one of the co-founders of the Women's International Zionist Organisation, Rebecca Sieff, which attracted the half-Indian scientist J.B.S. Haldane, H.G. Wells, Kingsley Martin of the *New Statesman*, the explorer, writer and spiritualist Sir Francis Younghusband, Michael Foot, Edward Thompson of Oriel College, Hewlett Johnson and a scion of the chocolate-making empire, Dame Elizabeth Cadbury (also of the Quakers and the ILP).³⁰¹ Of course, the most consistent attendee of India League meetings, after Menon, was a New Scotland Yard policeman, reporting back to IPI.³⁰²

Excepting the policeman, these Britons would mix with diasporic Indians. This included Sundar Kabadi, (London correspondent of *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*), Said Amir Shah (a silk merchant involved in the film industry), Surat Ali, (who campaigned against the dire conditions of Indian seamen in Britain), Shiva Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. The sociability and political friendships between the Indian diaspora and radical Britons could be sustained, despite the wartime splintering of antifascism and anticolonialism. This increased as the war wore on, as figures that the India League attracted became increasingly spectacular and drawn from a more diverse base than the highly political left as the League extended its network into the radical, dissenting, aristocracy and the artistic *avant garde*, creating not only an anticolonial politics but an insurgently cosmopolitan anticolonial counter-culturalism.

Indian independence had clearly become a campaigning issue for those Britons who had led unconventional lives or pursued radical politics, often signified by Spain. The sixteenth Earl of Huntingdon provides an excellent example of this. The 'Red Earl' was a direct descendent of one of William I's conquering Normans Lords but took the Labour whip. From the red

³⁰¹ IPI to Silver, 18.10.1941, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/453.

³⁰² ENSYR, 4.2.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/454.

benches he advocated for India and, later, the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the abolition of capital punishment and nuclear disarmament.³⁰³ Huntingdon knew Robeson, had joined the highly political Artist International Association³⁰⁴ and, as a younger man, had fallen under the spell of Diego Rivera, both artistically and politically. He worked for years as Riviera's assistant, living with him and his wife, Frida Kahlo, amidst 'glass jars of paint, tacked canvases, a Spanish guitar, rolls of drawings and plans and all the clutter of an artist.'³⁰⁵ Joining Rivera in the USA, he had witnessed the rigours of Fordism and the misery of the Great Depression, leading him to attend lectures on Marxism in Chicago.³⁰⁶ He recalled that 'I really swung over to socialism when I worked for on a mural for a wheat-broker in Chicago and wheat was being burnt outside the city while half the population starved.'³⁰⁷ The Marx Memorial Library in London has a didactic mural by Huntingdon which clearly pays homage to Rivera and Marx³⁰⁸ but the 'Red Earl' was no communist. He had seen through Soviet manipulations during the Spanish Civil War, a visit he made in the company of William Dobbie of the National Union of Railwaymen (a trade union which supported the India League) and future chairman of the India League.³⁰⁹

In campaigning for Indian independence, the Red Earl shared with the India League its key themes of colonial violence, economic nationalism and antifascism. When the Under-Secretary of State for India tabled a bill expediting 'the authorities in India in their task of maintaining law and order under conditions of emergency arising out of the war, by facilitating the prompt execution of death sentences and thereby investing them with their full deterrent value' Huntingdon warned the Lords that 'Americans cannot understand how it is

³⁰³ Selina Hastings, *The Red Earl: The Extraordinary Life of the 16th Earl of Huntingdon*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 190.

³⁰⁴ Selina Hastings, *The Red Earl*, 169.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 120.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 160.

³⁰⁷ *The Guardian*, 20.6.1969, cited in Selina Hastings, *The Red Earl*, 167.

³⁰⁸ Selina Hastings, *The Red Earl*, 159.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 136.

that we are fighting a war for freedom and liberation and yet are repressing in the most violent way the national movement in India. This is also being felt even more strongly in China and in the Soviet Union.’³¹⁰ Huntingdon even published a volume entitled *Commonsense about India*, which bought into Naorojian economic nationalism, arguing that ‘In the course of converting India from a self-supporting sub-continent into a source of raw materials for British industry and a vast dependent market for British manufacturers, those native industries have been destroyed, so that the spinners and weavers and hand-workers and their descendants have been thrown on the land as their only remaining support.’³¹¹ Given his experience of dust-bowl America, it is unsurprising that Huntingdon adapted economic nationalism into speeches about the Bengal famine. Dismissing the loss of Burmese rice and war conditions as a determinate cause, he argued for the limiting of free markets in food through ‘price control; the establishment of a food grains reserve; control of distribution, transport and supplies; extension of rationing in the cities; the creation of a Central Food Board with wide powers, and especially the stopping of all food exports and, instead, the importing of large stocks to meet the emergency.’³¹²

By 1943 Huntingdon had begun chairing meetings of the India League alongside Lord Farringdon,³¹³ one of the wealthiest men in England and his ‘old ally from Eton and Oxford.’³¹⁴ While Huntingdon was a heterosexual supporter of the rights of homosexual men, workers and India, Farringdon was a homosexual himself. Returning to Leela Gandhi’s work, in her outstanding chapter on Edward Carpenter she ponders the affinity between the homosexual and the anticolonial position: arising, perhaps, from the position of being members of a community of outsiders.³¹⁵ As she puts it ‘being gay has consequences, which

³¹⁰ HL Deb, 20.10.1942, vol. 124 col 688-708.

³¹¹ Published as Lord Huntingdon, *Commonsense about India* (London: Heinemann), 22.

³¹² HL Deb, 20.10.1943, vol. 129 col 256.

³¹³ India League, Minutes of the Meeting of the Secretariat, 6.1.1943, KMP/NMML/188.

³¹⁴ Selina Hastings, *The Red Earl*, 172.

³¹⁵ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 36.

may lead us into making alliances with other oppressed groups.’³¹⁶ Naturally, the inversion was equally true: John Nott-Bower was Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, veteran of colonial policing in India and zealous colleague of IPI. His efforts in chasing Indian anticolonialists like Chandrashekar Azad were exceeded only by his systematic persecution of homosexual British men.

Lord Farringdon’s protest against the heterosexuality of his reluctant (and swiftly annulled) wedding was to invite Florence Mills, a Cabaret singer born to formerly enslaved African Americans, to perform. His rebellion was also ‘against his family’s Conservative politics’³¹⁷ and he also sat as a Labour peer. For Farringdon, antiracism, homosexuality, pacifism and political work for India and Spain appear to form a congruent politics. He had donated his Rolls-Royce to the Republic, where it served as an ambulance. As a pacifist he nevertheless served with courage as a stretcher-bearer in Spain, housed Spanish refugees in London and founded, alongside Cripps, an organisation called Friends of the Spanish People. Farringdon also travelled through India and, despite his mother’s hope that he would be Viceroy someday, threw in his lot with Congress. He shuttled between Britain and India during the Round Table Conferences and relayed letters to the Conference from an absent Gandhi.³¹⁸ It is likely that, similarly to Hyndman, Bridgeman Carritt and those firemen, it was India that led him to the British left.³¹⁹ Farringdon was very active in the India League, addressing meetings of Indian workers in Birmingham³²⁰ and joining the League’s parliamentary committee,³²¹ thereby giving the League a voice in the House of Lords along with Huntingdon and Lord Strabolgi.³²² In one notable intervention, Farringdon blamed Indian communal division on the

³¹⁶ Ibid, 38.

³¹⁷ Chris Farman, Valery Rose and Liz Woolley, *No Other Way: Oxfordshire and the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939* (Oxford International Brigade Memorial Committee, 2015), 79-80.

³¹⁸ Roger Vlitos, *Gavin Farringdon: Portrait of a Rebel Peer* (Faringdon: Libri Publishing 2022), 171.

³¹⁹ Roger Vlitos, *Gavin Farringdon*, 96.

³²⁰ Chief Constable of Birmingham to Major D.B. Dykes, 26.01.1944, BL/IOR/L/PJ/456.

³²¹ NMML/KMP/191.

³²² NMML/KMP/191 and HL Deb 25.7.1944 vol 132. col. 1108-21.

British because they had put ‘most of the leaders of political opinion...in prison and in prison separately.’³²³ His most important intervention for India, however, was to successfully call for the Cripps Mission.³²⁴

In 1943 Huntingdon chaired an India League protest meeting at the London Coliseum where he shared a platform with S.O. Davies, further demonstrating the India League’s ability to produce an insurgent sociability, even among the British, which in turn strengthened its anticolonialism. Davies had left school at the age of twelve to go down the Cwmpennar coal mine, though he later made it to University College Cardiff. There, he fell under the influence of the radical preacher, R.J. Campbell, who argued that socialism was the practical expression of Christianity. An admirer of the USSR (he would be accused of being a ‘fellow traveller’) Davies had a fierce independence of mind that repeatedly cost him the Labour whip. He was a pacifist during the Great War, took an active part in the General Strike and was elected with support of the Miners Federation to Parliament, where he spent his early career attacking appeasement and calling for a united front against the dictators, making him a proponent of the Spanish Universality. He opposed Labour’s entry into the wartime coalition, making him an isolated figure but remained wildly popular with his Merthyr constituency and served them for 38 years.³²⁵ Davies often spoke on India in Parliament (once interrupting an unhinged Churchillian diatribe against Congress with the accurate description ‘nonsense’³²⁶), on large platforms for the India League and in intimate settings alongside the League’s working-class British Indian supporters.³²⁷ Crucially, he brought with him the radical world of the South Wales Miners, an influential constituency within the Labour Movement.

³²³ HL Deb 6.4.1943, vol. 127, col. 18.

³²⁴ HL Deb, 3.2.1942, vol. 121 col. 589.

³²⁵ See Alun Morgan ‘The 1970 Parliamentary Election at Merthyr Tydfil’ *Morgannwg: Transactions of the Glamorgan Local History Society* 22 (1978), 63-81.

³²⁶ HC Deb, 10.9.1942, vol. 383 col. 302.

³²⁷ ENSYR, 22.11.1944, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

The Coliseum meeting drew an audience of thousands, in part due to the efforts of Dutt and the CPGB, which was already supporting the League's celebration of 'India Week' throughout Britain.³²⁸ In preparation, the India League began printing summaries of British repression in India, selections of Gandhi's writings, an 'A.B.C. of India,'³²⁹ pamphlets and even offering to cable resolutions supporting Indian independence to the Viceroy for the small fee of 2/6d.³³⁰ The League began producing badges in Congress colours which district branches of the CPGB sold on their behalf.³³¹ The Communists informed these branches that 'there can be no unified strategy, no victory policy that does not provide for the freeing of the Indian people so that they can play a full and active part in the struggle against Fascism.' Shop Stewards were asked for speakers to discuss India at factory canteens, and to 'carry out the widest publicity for the great rally' and to 'pack Holborn Hall.'³³² IPI was alarmed by the 1500 posters and 400,000 handbills printed for the Coliseum meeting: so many were ordered that the printers were unable to source the paper.³³³ Cornelia Sorabji (a complex figure: pathbreaking for Indian women practicing law, but fiercely loyal to the *Raj*) even complained to the Home Secretary about the 'posters with which London is plastered' by the India League and accused it of deceiving 'the ignorant and emotional in England and America – including some MPs.'³³⁴

Sorabji's irritation is the good evidence that the India League was having a noticeable impact in Britain. In achieving this the India League had, perhaps, figured out that meetings limited to haranguing speeches were boring its audiences. Its network now enabled a more diverse portfolio of anticolonial activity, however, and one that drew on radical trends in British

³²⁸ IPI to Silver, 6.1.43, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

³²⁹ IPI to Silver, 18.1.43, BL/IOR/L/PJ/455.

³³⁰ IPI to Silver, 6.1.43, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

³³¹ CPGB to All Districts (n.d.) NMML/KMP/149.

³³² CPGB to Branch Secretaries and Group Leaders, 19.1.1943, NMML/KMP/149.

³³³ IPI to Silver, 18.1.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

³³⁴ Cornelia Sorabji to Herbert Morrison, 21.1.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/453.

artistic life and blended them with Indian and transnational activists and artists. The Coliseum meeting involved recitations by Jean Forbes Robertson, famous for her portrayal of Peter Pan. Also on the stage was Sybil Thorndike, the celebrated Shakespearean actress who was associated with the pacifist organisations connected to the League and had spent the war performing plays for Welsh Miners.³³⁵ The event was compered by André van Gysegem of the Unity Theatre. This had a history of staging anti-fascist ‘agitprop’ productions and even a play by Mulk Raj Anand about the Bengal famine, where the proceeds went to its victims.³³⁶ The antiracist world was also represented, despite the challenges of the war. One of the musical leaders was Rudolph Dunbar, the Guyanese activist and conductor who was the first person of African descent to conduct the Berlin and London Philharmonics. His music mixed African spiritual and Indian nationalist songs, sung by a choir from the Unity and Co-Operative movements together with Indian singers draped in Congress flags.³³⁷ Even IPI conceded that the meeting was ‘well stage-managed’³³⁸ by ‘well-known persons in the theatrical world’ with the result that it drew an audience of ‘some thousands.’³³⁹ The seats in the Coliseum had been bought ‘twice over’ by supporters in order to raise extra funds for the India League with the result that ‘an overflow meeting was held at Garrick Theatre.’³⁴⁰

In his speech to the Coliseum, Huntingdon evoked the ‘horrors committed in India,’ and called for negotiations with Indian leaders, because ‘this was a war against Fascism and Britain could not possibly deny India her right to be free.’ Davies used economic nationalism: ‘India a land of immense potential wealth, was one of the poorest in the world’ because ‘British rule was an ignominious failure’ with illiteracy and an ‘appalling famine due to

³³⁵ Jonathan Croall, *Sybil Thorndike: A Star of Life* (London: Haus Publishing, 2008), 300-324

³³⁶ ENSYR, 23.6.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455

³³⁷ ENSYR 3.2.1943 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455

³³⁸ IPI to Silver 24.2.1943 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455

³³⁹ From a later report, IPI to Silver 5.3.1945 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12456

³⁴⁰

malnutrition.’ The audience cried shame. The influential, half-Indian, biologist J.B.S. Haldane (who invented terms like ‘clone’ and ‘primordial soup’) then spoke, attacking British government inefficiency and stating that ‘imperialism demanded sweated labour in Bombay and Calcutta to reduce the standard of living of the workers in Lancashire and in Dundee’ before pivoting to anti-fascism: ‘imperialists could collaborate with Darlan and a Peyrouton but not with a Nehru or a Rajagopalachari.’ He ended amidst cheers by proclaiming that ‘India’s liberty is also our liberty.’³⁴¹

The India Office sent its own private informant to the Coliseum, who provided a richer and more impressionistic view of the event than the dour reports written by IPI’s police spies. According to the India Office man the crowd believed that Menon ‘represented India, the much oppressed country whose co-operation was being refused by the men of Munich, the secret friends of Fascism, the upholders of Darlanism.’ He also recalled that:

from what I could gather from conversation with numerous people inside the Coliseum, it would seem that many attended the meeting to show their “solidarity” with the “people of India” in “their struggle against imperialist Tories”...I gather that anyone voting against the resolution would have been beaten up “into jelly” – because “we don’t want any Fascists here. Imagine our boys firing on poor people who have no money for potatoes.”

The sociability of the India League worked wonders, as members of the audience marvelled at the vision of ‘a Lord sitting side by side with a Miner MP’³⁴² to deliver the same message about Indian freedom. Importantly, the informant overheard attendees vowing to petition their

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³⁴² Report by India-Burma Association on India League Demonstration at the London Coliseum, 13.1.1943, BL/IO/L/I/723.

MPs on the question of India. The cost of the event was considerable and, despite IPI's certainty that the CPGB would pay the bill, it was defrayed by British Indians.³⁴³ The London Coliseum meeting shows the mature anticolonial politics of the India League, including a renewal of the languages of Naorojian economic critique and antifascism, but also a development of an anticolonial counter-culture. This demonstrates that the old solidarities of anticolonialism and antifascism were not the ephemeral product of a particular conjuncture, when antifascism and anticolonialism were the politics of the street in the age of both imperialism and appeasement. It was, instead, a resilient political language and the basis of an increasingly effective mobilisation: the light of the Spanish Universality was still flickering.

The India League and the Trades Unions, 1939-1944

The India League was also rebuilding bridges with the parliamentary Labour Party. Sorensen's speech at the 1941 Conference stated, 'that in normal times there are more people half-starved in our Empire in India than through the dominion of Hitler himself.' The same Conference saw a speech that warned Labour that if they 'condoned the iniquity in India' – the crushing of the 1941 *satyagraha* – the Party was not the heir of the 'Scottish Covenanters, who died of the moorlands, of the Tolpuddle Martyrs and the Chartists' but 'the spiritual descendants of their persecutors.'³⁴⁴ Antifascism – the most important afterlife of the Spanish Universality – remained a theme at party conferences throughout the war. A speaker at the 1943 Party Conference stated that 'when the French, the Poles, Norwegians and Czechs demand their freedom from the Nazi occupying power, they are regarded as heroes, but when the Indians claim the same rights from this Coalition government they are treated as traitors

³⁴³ ENSYR 14.4.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

³⁴⁴ LP/RAC, 1941.

and terrorists.’³⁴⁵ The origins of the Cripps Mission can be traced to the 1941 Party Conference and further India League pressure, which is examined in chapter four as the Mission contained the first official concession of a Constituent Assembly. The failure of the Mission, however, and the outbreak of the Quit India Movement, burned all of Congress’s bridges to Labour. It also cut off the India League from the Labour leadership, though the parliamentary party remained restive and open to League pressure. A few MPs were not enough, however, to sway the Labour Party against the wishes of the National Executive. There was only one section of the Labour movement that could do that, due to the power of its block votes: the trades unions.

While the League had alliances with the Indian Workers Association and the Colonial Seamen’s Union,³⁴⁶ it now needed big British unions to mount a proper rebellion from the Conference floor. Nandy and Gandhi investigate the politics of friendship in a minor key, and much of the focus on anticolonialism has been confined to individual intellectuals and activists.³⁴⁷ The India League’s campaign among Britain’s trades unions is a demonstration of the politics of friendship on a major scale. It enables me to broaden this study to the organised British working-class, the anticolonial activities of which have never been the attention of a dedicated study. Indeed, historians argue the opposite: Howe states that ‘the focus of attention of British trade unionism was by tradition almost wholly parochial’ with its anticolonial anxieties confined to competition from ‘sweated labour.’ Alliances were apparently impossible due to the TUC preferring ‘non-political’³⁴⁸ organising, producing a clash with highly political colonial trades unions. This is disproven by the success of the India League’s campaign, which is also a useful measure of the wide spread of the India

³⁴⁵ LP/RAC, 1943.

³⁴⁶ IPI, Report, 30.3.40, The National Archives (UK)/Records of the Security Service/KV2/2509 (Hereafter: TNA/MI5).

³⁴⁷ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 12.

³⁴⁸ Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism*, 77-78.

League's anticolonial arguments. Speeches by Trades Unionists did not support Indian independence as 'empire's fulfilment' and, instead, repudiated the violence and fascist characteristics of imperial rule and held to the most radical position (identical to the one advanced by Congress) that Indian independence could come before the end of the war as a free India would be better placed to fight fascism.

At the 1941 Labour Party Conference, Gordon Macdonald, an India Leaguer and Labour MP, made an appeal in the name of his Mining Union to the TUC 'to help us as a political movement, as we sometimes help them as an industrial movement, on this question of India.'³⁴⁹ The Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers (NUDAW) and Women's Co-Operative guilds had also started passing resolutions supporting Indian independence.³⁵⁰ By 1942 IPI was aware that the India League was hoping that through the 'Shop Stewards Association, the Miners Federation, the National Union of Railwaymen and other sympathetic Trade Union Associations' it could 'influence large sections of the British working public'³⁵¹ towards Indian independence.

In this campaign the India League had an ally. As Bridgeman wound up the British Section of the LAI, it recognised 'the ban placed upon it by the Labour Party, and noting the growth of the Unity Campaign, resolved to reconstitute itself into the Colonial Information Bureau, [CIB]' and carry on:

'the anti-imperialist work through the broad channels of the Trade Union and labour movements, and through the rapidly developing Unity campaign, which in its

³⁴⁹ LP/RAC, 1941.

³⁵⁰ IL/EC, (no specific date) 12.1942, NMML/KMP/176.

³⁵¹ IPI 'Indian Notes' in IPI to Silver, 10.6.42, BI/IOR/L/PJ/12/454.

manifesto says “Let the Labour movement declare without equivocation that it supports the struggle of the Indian and colonial peoples against imperialism...”

In an echo of Besant’s original program, Bridgeman’s main objective was for ‘labour organisations in Britain expose the imperialist lies about the Congress, India and incessantly campaign for Indian freedom.’³⁵² In campaigning among the unions, the India League, along with the CIB, continued to create its characteristic insurgent sociability. To take one example, a delegate conference held in 1942 drew 750 attendees and ‘particular satisfaction was felt at the support given by the Labour Party and by Trades Union circles – especially the Amalgamated Engineering Union’ as well as ‘38 pacifist and 21 [anti-]colonial organisations.’³⁵³ There were ‘400 delegates representing various Leftist bodies, 55 TUC representatives, South Wales Miners, pacifists, Communists.’³⁵⁴ Among the delegates were Sasadhar Sinha, a bookshop-owner and ‘two officials of the Jamiat-ul-Muslimin [sic]’³⁵⁵ which operated the East London Mosque, along with four other members of the East End Indian community. The India League was clearly working to include diverse members of the British Indian diaspora into its campaign for Indian self-determination.

The CIB and the India League were also relaying information received from organised Indian Labour, especially the former Meerut Prisoners. P.C. Joshi supplied documents and photographs that confirmed the appalling famine conditions in Bengal, which increasingly became the basis of the India League’s campaign. S.A. Dange, a founder of the CPI and President of the All-India Trades Union Congress (AITUC) came to Britain in 1943 and 1944

³⁵² CIB, ‘India Report’ (n.d., year: 1944) HHC/RBP/U/DBN/26/1.

³⁵³ IPI to Silver, 15.8.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/454.

³⁵⁴ IPI to the Secretary of State for India, 21.8.1941, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/454.

³⁵⁵ Metropolitan Police, Report on East End Meeting Held by Krishna Menon on 9.8.41, (copy held by IPI dated to 12.8.1941), BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/454.

and campaigned among workers³⁵⁶ in Lancashire and among MPs associated with the Trades Union Congress.³⁵⁷ There was a new, labourist, dimension to the League's anticolonial transnationality. Towards the very end of the war, as travel became easier, the League held a reception in Holborn Hall so that 'members and supporters of the India League could meet S.A. Dange, R.A. Khedgikar and B.K. Paramanik, the AITUC delegates to the World Trades Union Conference.' There were also representatives of labour organisations from the USA, USSR, New Zealand, Canada and West Africa. S.A. Dange shared a platform with the I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, a Sierra Leonean workers' leader, journalist activist, pan-Africanist and old connection from the Spanish Universality. Also on the platform was the suffragist and Labour MP, Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, soon to be appointed Secretary of State for India. He was 'loudly applauded when he stated that India should be given her independence if she was to be an equal partner with other nations in the post-war world. He added that the Labour movement in Britain had pledged itself to a free India.'³⁵⁸

The India League's campaign ranged from small, local trade associations to national and mass-member trade unions. In addition to prewar connections with Arthur Horner of the Miners and Jack Tanner of the AEU, one of the ways in was through India League-affiliated MPs. To take one example, the India League drew on the help of John Jagger MP, who had been president of NUDAW. In 1939, Gordon MacDonald had joined the India League's parliamentary committee, a connection with the large and powerful Mineworkers Federation of Great Britain. In addition to S.O. Davies and his connections with South Wales, another mining MP who supported the India League was Alexander 'Sanny' Sloan. Sloan was a firebrand former ILP-er, MP for Ayrshire and active member of the Union of Scottish

³⁵⁶ ENSYR, 7.6.1944, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456, Michael Carritt to 'Dear Comrade', 11.11.1943, CIB, *Inside the Empire* (pamphlet, n.d.) HHC/RBP/UBN/26/1 and NMML/KMP/155.

³⁵⁷ IL/EC, 11.10.1944 and 6.12.1944, NMML/KMP/176.

³⁵⁸ ENSYR, 28.2.1945, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

Mineworkers. By 1944 Sloan had been actively discussing the India League and its work with organised Scottish Miners, who agreed to raise the issue with the Scottish Trades Union Congress,³⁵⁹ which duly passed a supportive resolution on India.³⁶⁰

Over the course of the war the India League affiliated with unions and associations that ranged from the Bricket Wood Cooperative Guild (12 members), through the Fairey Fuselage Department, the Short Brothers Shop Steward Association, the Association of Civil Service Designers and Draughtsmen to the Clerical and Administrative Workers Union (33,900 members), the Fire Brigades Union (FBU: 50,000 members) and the Tobacco Workers Union (17,000 members).³⁶¹ One notable India League meeting, held in October 1943, included some 260 trades union delegates, including Alfred Davies of the South Wales Miners and even a representative of Ernest Bevin's Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), the largest trade union in Britain.³⁶² Motivations for affiliation or interest from these unions varied but in the case of the FBU, this was because some '300 firemen who had been sent from this country to India to train personnel when Japanese invasion had seemed imminent, had seen for themselves the condition and poverty of the people. They had returned to this country with a not very high opinion of the British administration.'³⁶³ By 1943, representatives of the FBU were regularly attending India League meetings along with representatives of the Lancashire Miners Federation³⁶⁴ and the South Wales Miners Federation.³⁶⁵ In addition, the AEU had many local branches affiliated with the India

³⁵⁹ IL/EC, 11.10.1944, NMML/KMP/176.

³⁶⁰ CIB, 'India Report' (n.d., year: 1944) HHC/RBP/U/DBN/26/1.

³⁶¹ NMML/KMP/208.

³⁶² ENSYR 13.10.1943 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

³⁶³ Birmingham City Police Criminal Investigative Department X Office, Report, 15.1.1944, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

³⁶⁴ ENSYR 17.3.1943 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

³⁶⁵ IPI to Silver, 19.10.1943 (enclosing an intercepted telegram: Ben Bradley to P.C. Joshi, 15.10.1943), BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455

League³⁶⁶ and passed supportive resolutions on India in 1943³⁶⁷ and 1944.³⁶⁸ The AEU would balloon in membership during World War II, making it a power at the Party Conference.

The most important supporter of the India League was the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR). At 404,355 members, the NUR was one of the largest Unions in Britain and another power at the Labour Party Conference. The NUR is the best example of the solidarities of the Spanish Universality surviving the war. William Dobbie, for example, was a former railway employee and member of the NUR, who sponsored his successful parliamentary candidature. Dobbie had travelled to Spain with Farringdon where fired a machine gun at fascists from the tower of a church. Later, he took over as chairman of the India League. The wider NUR had been on the forefront of anti-fascist resistance in 1930s, fighting legal campaigns against Mosley and providing a job for Peter Blackman, who helped Railwaymen with learning difficulties write letters. The NUR's particular interest in India may come from a solidarity of occupation that crossed the colonial divide: the NUR's archives contains literature from the Bengal and Nagpur Railway Employees Union, dating from the Indian railway strikes of 1926.³⁶⁹ The Union's journal, the *Railway Review*, had twice published long articles by Nehru.³⁷⁰ Remarkably, one of the NUR's presidents, Frederick Burrows, started life as a railway porter but ended his career as something of a roving agent for Attlee's decolonial efforts in South Asia, becoming a member of the Commission on Sri Lankan constitutional questions and the last Governor of Bengal.

Connections between the India League and the NUR started local: the League was active in the West of Scotland and particularly in Glasgow, holding a major delegate conference in the

³⁶⁶ See NMML/KMP/208.

³⁶⁷ IL/EC, 12.1943, NMML/KMP/176.

³⁶⁸ CIB 'India Report' (n.d., year: 1944) HHC/RBP/U/DBN/26/1.

³⁶⁹ MSS.127/NU/5/5/6/22, University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre, Archive of the National Union of Railwaymen.

³⁷⁰ Phillip S. Bagwell, *The Railwaymen: The History of the National Union of Railwaymen* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963), 700.

city in 1941. In the same year the Glasgow and West of Scotland District Council of the NUR urged their national body to ‘endeavour to secure the release of Nehru and his comrades.’ After the Atlantic Charter was issued, fifteen branches of the NUR pressured the leadership to ‘apply Freedom No. 3 of the Atlantic Charter’ to India.³⁷¹ In 1942 a representative of the NUR appeared on an India League platform, and declared that ‘the National Union of Railwaymen was very interested in the Indian war question and supported the demands raised in this meeting’ which included ‘independence for India’ the ‘release of political prisoners’ and the ‘establishment of democratic rights, parallel to those enjoyed by people in this country.’³⁷² Representatives from the NUR would attend many more India League meetings and sponsored the parliamentary campaigns of three Labour MPs who sat on the India League’s parliamentary and executive committees: William Dobbie, P.G. Barstow and John Hynd.³⁷³ Interestingly, these MPs collaborated beyond their formal union membership: Barstow of the NUR and Davies and Sloan of the Miners co-authored a pamphlet for the India League calling for Indian political freedom.³⁷⁴ The NUR also supported the India League’s arguments about Britain’s use of excessive colonial violence in India, probably helped by news of the brutal suppression of the Quit India Movement. In 1943 the NUR’s general meeting saw a speech citing the anti-fascist credentials of the Indian people and advancing a strongly anticolonial critique of the ‘62,000 arrests, 470 shootings, 1,025 killed and 3,105 wounded. And 958 whipped in the first five months since august last year.’³⁷⁵ The NUR Conference ‘was unanimous in urging the Government to “immediately open up negotiations with the principal national representatives of India with a view to the establishment of an Indian National Government.”’³⁷⁶

³⁷¹ Phillip S. Bagwell, *The Railwaymen*, 593-594.

³⁷² ENSYR, 4.2.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/454.

³⁷³ NMML/KMP/191.

³⁷⁴ P.G. Barstow, S.O. Davies and Alexander Sloan, *India and Victory: Our Immediate Task* (London: India League, 1942).

³⁷⁵ See HHC/RBP/U/DBN/26/1.

³⁷⁶ Phillip S. Bagwell, *The Railwaymen*, 593-594.

At the 1943 meeting of the TUC, the TGWU put forward a resolution which recognised that Indian ‘aspirations for self-government’ were ‘ultimately bound up with the defeat of Nazi and Fascist powers’ and called for ‘a resumption of free and friendly’ discussions. This was seconded by a fiery speech from the FBU which condemned the violence being used against Quit India, constitutional inertia, and drew on quotations from the Atlantic Charter to highlight the hypocrisy of imperial Britain fighting an antifascist war. It was the India League-affiliated Tobacco Workers, however (who had already passed their own resolution on Congress’s anti-fascist credentials³⁷⁷) who moved a radical amendment. This supported Congress’s key demands for the immediate release of political prisoners, the formation of a national government and dominions status *before* the war ended ‘in order to win the support of the people of India in our fight against Fascism.’ It was backed by the NUR which declared that Gandhi ‘was the greatest leader with the largest amount of Indian opinion behind him to-day’³⁷⁸ and made a direct comparison between India and Ireland, the Mahatma and John Redmond and the rightness of freedom after bitter sacrifice in war. The amendment was put as a substantive motion and passed! In doing so, the TUC chose the Congress line over that of the Labour leadership at the time, that a free India was a victory against global fascism.

At the next TUC Conference, the FBU kept the pressure up, submitting a resolution that stated that an Indian ‘National government, representative of the Indian people, is both desirable and possible’ as it ‘would assist in defence against Japanese fascism.’³⁷⁹ Converting the TUC was crucial for the imminent 1944 Labour Party Conference and the India League had been disheartened by the thinly-attended debate that accompanied the meeting³⁸⁰ so

³⁷⁷ HHC/RBP/UBN/26/1.

³⁷⁸ Trades Union Congress, *Report of the Proceedings of the 75th Annual Trades Union Congress 6th-10th September 1943* (London: Co-Operative Printing Society, 1943).

³⁷⁹ *Firefighter: Journal of the Fire Brigades Union*, 9.1944.

³⁸⁰ IL/EC, 8.11.1944, NMML/KMP/176.

Dange and Dobbie began lobbying TUC-affiliated Labour MPs.³⁸¹ The India League decided to call a conference near to where Labour was holding its own. It was addressed by Hynd of the NUR and chaired by Jack Tanner of the AEU. The audience numbered some 300, including thirty Indians and the rest Labour Party delegates. Hynd argued that Churchill's exclusion of India from the Atlantic Charter 'smacked very much of the Nazi doctrine of the master-race' and asked, 'how could we condemn the Nazis for their attempted domination of other races whilst we were doing the same thing?' He lauded the intentions of the NUR to 'place before the Labour Party a resolution calling for the release of political prisoners and the granting of independence to India.' Tanner told the Labour delegates that 'the British public must be held responsible for the actions of the British government in India' and ended his speech with a 'plea for unity among the working-class bodies of this country in order to assist India to achieve her independence.' The Conference passed a motion, enclosing the old India League arguments of antifascism and socialist solidarity and calling for a 'truly national government in India'³⁸² which was dispatched to the Labour Party Conference.

By October 1944 the India League had resolved that the two key arguments that should be raised at the Conference would be the release of political prisoners and famine conditions, the latter at Michael Carritt's suggestion.³⁸³ These themes would dominate speeches from the Conference floor, an indication of the League's increasing influence, cemented by Laski's election as chairman of Conference.³⁸⁴ Laski's opening address held that 'no British socialist can be happy while India remains a vast prison-house of which the keys are kept in Downing Street.' The Railwaymen later moved a resolution, drafted by the India League, that supported the Congress line that an 'independent Indian national government' should be

³⁸¹ IL/EC, 6.12.1944, NMML/KMP/176.

³⁸² ENSYR, 31.12.44, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

³⁸³ IL/EC, 11.10.1944, NMML/KMP/176.

³⁸⁴ T.J.S. George, *Krishna Menon*, 135.

formed before the end of the war because a free India would be a 'decisive factor in the fight against fascism.'³⁸⁵ Dr S. Datta, a member of the Bristol branch of the India League and the Bristol Labour Party,³⁸⁶ seconded the motion, by appealing to the Conference:

'When Labour stands at the threshold of power, the key to unlocking of that prison-house is lying on the floor of this Conference. You, as men who stand by the faith which you profess, who stand for the brotherhood of man irrespective of colour and race, you should take up that magic key, you have the power to unlock those gates.'

Sorensen spoke next, invoking economic nationalism, colonial violence and the Bengal famine:

outside this hall...there are certain pictures that tragically impress us with the war. Perhaps the display would have been a little more balanced if there had been also pictures of those who were victims of the Indian famine last year, for which we were constitutionally responsible...perhaps a few pictures of Indians being flogged might also have been put there...India is a poor land where hundreds of millions live practically on a starvation diet. The expectance of life at birth is only 27 years, compared with 62 in this country. And we have been in control of that land now for a long time.

Lucy Middleton (wife of the General Secretary of the Labour Party who attended League meetings before and after the war) blamed the failure of the Cripps Mission on Churchill, citing his 1930s diehard revolt as evidence, then begged the 'Conference to pass this

³⁸⁵ LP/RAC, 1944.

³⁸⁶ S. Datta to Menon, 6.12.44, NMML/KMP/155 and LP/RAC, 1944.

resolution unanimously, and to tell the great Indian people that this Movement is behind them in the fight that they are making for freedom and liberty.’ Another speaker read out a letter from his brother, a private soldier serving in the British Army in Bengal. Noting that he desired to get the letter published but that the British press was too afraid, a Mr. A.W.J. Lewis of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers (old allies of Tanner and the AEU³⁸⁷) read it out instead to the Conference. It is a remarkable text, enclosing economic nationalism, the dehumanisation of the colonial subject and the duplicities of the un-British empire:

The scene is Calcutta, the second largest city of the British Empire, a modern city like those of Britain. To your eyes a place of plenty; no poverty or squalor. We commence our visit to this wondrous place by walking through the main thoroughfare. On every side you will see evidence of wealth. We will adjourn for lunch. What do you want – chicken, pork, caviar. Ah! You say, this is proof that this city is lacking nothing in victuals...Lunch over, we will continue our walk. This time we will leave Chowringee and see what there is of interest in the maze and labyrinth of side streets....a man has just collapsed in front of us. This emaciated creature bears no resemblance to a human; look how his ribs are forcing themselves through the skin. It must be many a day since he partook of a meal, even of the scantiest sort...do you not see, now that the skin is off your eyes, indisputable proof of the starvation that is so prevalent in Calcutta? Look at the poor soul there; will he get to the end of the street before he too passes from the world?’

³⁸⁷ Hugh Armstrong Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889*, 3 vols, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), vol 3, 310.

The speakers at the 1944 Labour Party Conference made no mention, as Attlee would, of ‘saving India to the Empire’³⁸⁸ and there was no praise of Britain’s mission there, no consolatory grasping after Dominion status or the Commonwealth connection. On the contrary, on the floor of the 1944 Labour Party Conference, a trades union leader declared that British rule in India stood indicted by the holocaust in Bengal and as such, constituted ‘facts that make us in the Labour Movement feel disgusted at times to be Britishers.’ The National Executive then intervened, asking for the NUR’s resolution to be rejected due to the threat of Japan and, bizarrely, the need to further democratise India and support the new Revolutionary Socialist Party.³⁸⁹ The NEC was defeated and, in celebration of the Railwaymen’s resolution being passed, branches of the India League organised meetings in more than ten cities, often with communist support and attracting (according to the police) ‘considerable publicity.’³⁹⁰ With the help of Sloan, Menon re-joined the Labour Party.³⁹¹ The Glasgow India League ran a follow-up conference where Menon ‘expressed satisfaction at the India Resolution sponsored by the National Union of Railwaymen at the Labour Party Conference and claimed its adoption represented the fruits of “political education” carried out by the India League.’³⁹² Whether or not this claim is true, the 1944 Party Conference is evidence that the India League was a power within Labour. At Conference, the ‘trades union steamroller’ was often used to squash radical motions arising from left-wing pressure groups at the back of the hall. In 1944, however, the India League turned the steamroller around and used it to flatten the NEC. The resulting resolution was possibly the first major declaration of intent for Indian independence by a significant British political body that was unconditional and immediate, and yet the campaign that preceded it has never been written about by any historian. This is surprising as it is a powerful demonstration of both Indian anticolonial

³⁸⁸ War Cabinet Paper, 2.2.1942, TP 1, 111.

³⁸⁹ LP/RAC, 1944.

³⁹⁰ ENSYR, 31.1.45, IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

³⁹¹ Alexander Sloan to Morgan Phillips, 26.12.1944, NMML/KMP/152.

³⁹² IPI to Silver, 28.12.44, BL/IO/L/PJ/12/646.

agency and the ethical internationalism and anticolonialism of Britain's trade union movement. This, in turn, demonstrates the breadth of anticolonial sentiment and political friendship with India: far from being the concerns of fire-breathing radicals and intellectuals, it had become a concern of mass-membership trades unions. Finally, it is a concrete demonstration that the end of the British Empire in India was presaged by anticolonial sentiment: an ethical revulsion against imperialism and its methods within the very political party that presided over Indian independence.

This was not just sentiment. It is worth noting that at the same Conference, Ian Mikardo pushed a resolution (over the objections of the NEC) for key nationalisations. These became government policy after 1945 which indicates that Conference resolutions did not simply evaporate, especially if they had a good parliamentary lobby behind it. As the war drew closer to its end the India League had become a significant part of Britain's radical associational life, having made inroads into the trades union movement and parliamentary Labour Party, where its committee sat thirty-nine members.³⁹³ It was therefore well-placed, when the wartime coalition broke up in 1945, to lobby Labour candidates on Indian independence. It resolved to supply 'left and progressive candidates...with facts about the Indian situation' and reminded that 'we can provide the answer to the usual Tory questions'³⁹⁴ about India. Labour candidates were to be reminded of the 'appropriate resolutions and decisions of their own party bearing on the independence and self-determination of India' and lobbied to 'obtain the inclusion of India in their election appeals'³⁹⁵ which often succeeded. After the election the League issued a circular to Labour MPs, congratulating them on their 'splendid victory'³⁹⁶ and a press service celebrated how the 'great Labour victory' had 'placed

³⁹³ Reginald Sorensen, 'The India League: A Note by Reginald Sorensen', 6.9.1945, NMML/KMP/191.

³⁹⁴ India League, notes of the joint Meeting of the executive and parliamentary committees held at the House of Commons on 30th May 1945, NMML/KMP/157.

³⁹⁵ See NMML/KMP/157.

³⁹⁶ India League, Circular, 30.9.1945, NMML/KMP/191.

real and abundant power in the hands of a government in Britain pledged to independence and self-determination for India.³⁹⁷ The Government of India, meanwhile, was nervously noting the ‘tendency in Congress circles to connect the traditional sympathy of British labour with India’s aspiration for self-government as a spur to quick action’ and that Congress felt that Labour had no excuse for ‘any delay in implementation of pledged indicated by the socialist movement at large.’³⁹⁸

Congress’s hopes were not misplaced. In 1945, the India League, an anticolonial transnational organisation which, while it had a substantial British membership, was funded and led by Indians and British Indians and allied with Nehru and the Congress Socialist Party, received applications from roughly *one hundred* Members of the Parliament of the imperial power to join its longstanding parliamentary committee. The League claimed the support of some two hundred MPs, which would have made its parliamentary lobby larger than the Conservative Party in the 1945 Parliament. This would have been a dramatic culmination of its campaign of political friendship, but the archival evidence for this larger number is inconclusive.³⁹⁹ Nevertheless, backbench support now ranged from the outright Communist, William Gallacher, through crypto-communists like Lester Hutchinson, left-wing MPs like Michael Foot and Barbara Castle, to George Chetwynd, an ally of Hugh Dalton, TGWU MPs like A.E. Stubbs and David Rees-Williams (a junior Minister in the Colonial Office), the anti-communist Leslie Haden-Guest and Clement Davies, the Leader of the Liberal Party. There was also, as ever, Davies, Sorensen and the India League/NUR trio of Dobbie, Hynd and Barstow as well as Lords Farringdon, Huntingdon and Strabolgi in the Lords.⁴⁰⁰ At a reception for one hundred Labour MPs ‘sympathetic to the cause of Indian independence,’

³⁹⁷ India League, Press Service, 1.8.1945, NMML/KMP/193.

³⁹⁸ Government of India (Information and Broadcasting Department) to Secretary of State for India, 1.8.1945, TP 9, 1.

³⁹⁹ NMML/KMP/191 contains one hundred signed applications from Labour MPs joining the India League’s parliamentary committee.

⁴⁰⁰ ENSYR, 15.8.1945, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456 and NMML/KMP/191.

(which IPI was watching: the *Raj* spying on a large section of the party now governing Britain) Barstow called for the India League to become an 'integral part of the British Labour movement' while another MP held that 'no less than the majority of Labour MPs wanted to see India achieve her complete independence.' Farringdon 'declared that he would not tolerate any dilly-dallying by the Government, neither would he accept any excuse put forward for postponing the granting of independence to India.'⁴⁰¹ It was then 'proposed that a deputation of Labour MPs should call on the Secretary of State for India to release all political prisoners, the restoration of civil liberties, and the holding of free and non-communal elections.'⁴⁰² At the meeting, the delegation 'explained that the five Members of Parliament represented a considerable number of Labour Members of Parliament...they presumed that any declaration which might be made in regard to India would be based on the announced policy of the Labour Party as agreed at the postponed 1944 Conference.' Pethick-Lawrence agreed that 'their comments represented Labour Party policy' and assured them that 'The Cabinet intended to do as their best at the earliest possible moment to secure Indian freedom...with the right of secession from the Empire if desired.'⁴⁰³ Michael Foot would hail the India League's 'important role in changing Labour opinion by the end of the war'⁴⁰⁴ while Attlee noted that any attempt to reassert British rule in India would be impossible, partly because 'public opinion especially in our party would not stand for it.'⁴⁰⁵ During his visit to Britain, the Viceroy became convinced that Attlee and Cripps, in pursuing the independence of India, were acting to placate opinion in their own party.⁴⁰⁶ Cripps was already reassuring Menon that their ideas for Indian independence, worked out at Goodfellows at the height of

⁴⁰¹ ENSYR, 29.7.1945, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

⁴⁰² ENSYR, 29.8.1945, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

⁴⁰³ 'Note of Meeting between Lord Pethick-Lawrence and a deputation of Labour Members of Parliament', 17.9.1945, TP 11, 264-268

⁴⁰⁴ Janaki Ram, *V.K. Krishna Menon*, 69.

⁴⁰⁵ 'Notes by the Prime Minister,' n.d., likely 12.11.1946, TP 9, 68.

⁴⁰⁶ Archibald Wavell, *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, ed. Penderel Moon (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 169 (hereafter, *Wavell Journal*).

the Spanish Universality and abortively implemented by the Cripps Mission would become party policy, which they did.⁴⁰⁷

With the postwar resumption of both global mobility and European imperialism, especially in East Asia, the India League revived its more transnational anticolonialism. It held meetings to protest the sending of Indian troops to Java⁴⁰⁸ and opposed, alongside an ‘unknown Annamite’⁴⁰⁹ the Anglo-French taskforce being sent to recolonise Vietnam. A meeting, held in Lancashire, drew some two hundred and fifty people including trades unionists, Donald Moore (a political associate of Marcus Garvey), Kenyatta and K.C. Reddy of the Mysore State Congress Party.⁴¹⁰ The League also began protesting the treatment of Indians in South Africa, with Ashwin Choudree of the South African Indian Congress telling an India League audience that Jan Smuts could be compared to the Nazis.⁴¹¹ Thus, the India League represented a dramatic survival and an enduring legacy of the Spanish Universality: an anticolonial alliance that ranged from Clement Davies to Palme Dutt and, at various times, involved the NUR, Thorndike, Padmore, Nehru, Cripps, an ‘unknown Annamite,’ Dange, Middleton, Robeson, Pankhurst, the ILP, the Earl of Huntingdon and a swathe of the parliamentary Labour Party.

By the late 1930s the India League had escaped polite and moderate theosophy and, thanks to the ILP, was able to march in step with the Congress Party emerging after the Lahore declaration. Its distinctive politics hybridised Indian anticolonialism with British and global socialism, anti-fascism and other progressive movements. This formed a fusional political language that posited a universal category of the oppressed. This included all the victims of

⁴⁰⁷ Menon to Nehru, 2.8.1945, cited in Jairam Ramesh, *Chequered Brilliance*, 360.

⁴⁰⁸ ENSYR, 30.1.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

⁴⁰⁹ ENSYR, 2.1.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

⁴¹⁰ Manchester City Police Service, Report, 22.11.1945, in IPI to Silver, 30.11.1945, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/45.

⁴¹¹ ENSYR 9.5.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

an elided imperialism and fascism and which took as its emotional register the plight of the Spanish Republic. This politics existed long after the organisational alliance collapsed into the contradictions of World War II and underpinned later solidarities. The India League's meetings could, on occasion, attract audiences in the thousands, producing an insurgent sociability and network which included, critically, mass-membership trades unions. The India League's network also exhibited signs of a counter-verticality which provided a crucial exchange of anticolonial ideas through the Goodfellows agreement, a victory at the 1944 Labour Party Conference and a parliamentary lobby that brought a strong presence for India in both Houses and after 1945, the power to pressure a government which, in any case, included several India League allies, including Cripps and Tom Williams. This is evidence of the remarkable variety, number and political power of the anticolonial politics that existed in reference to India and the ways in which it exceeded India itself as a bounded territory or a possessive community of belonging through its transnationality, solidarity and universality.

II

Anticolonialism as a Form of Knowledge:

The *Condition of India*, Parliamentary Questions and the India-Burma Association, 1932-1947

For Annie Besant it was the founding ‘duty of the League to spread among the people of the United Kingdom the knowledge which will convince them that they are in duty as well as in common sense, bound to co-operate with India in the establishment of Home Rule.’ This knowledge was to be of the ‘un-British methods’⁴¹² used to govern India. In addition to being a network, therefore, the India League’s anticolonialism was also a form of knowledge, just as colonialism was, as amply demonstrated since the work of Bernard S. Cohn.⁴¹³ I offer no general theoretical pinning of anticolonial knowledge’s epistemic coordinates but do offer a sample of the analytical rewards of investigating anticolonialism as a politics of knowledge-making. Unlike colonialism, anticolonialism had no recourse to the power or authority of the state and, in this case, operated through a network of solidarities and political friendships as well as left-wing periodicals and small, radical publishers. Colonial and anticolonial knowledge-making are both linked to political programs, however, be it the discursive justifying or undermining of empire. Both claim the right to represent based on methodology or authoritative status (who *really* knows India? Statistic-wielding colonial officials or Indians themselves?). In the colonial case, the ethnographic state produced knowledge that informed governmental modalities, deeply distorting colonial societies as a result.

Anticolonial knowledge might produce a dissenting valorisation of ‘native’ society and

⁴¹² Annie Besant, ‘Home Rule for India League: Pamphlet No. 1: What India Wants’ (n.d., likely 1916) NMML/ABP/Part II/14c-D-19(5).

⁴¹³ For his classic exposition, see Bernard S Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022 edition).

culture as a political resource, but it also produced an inverted ethnography of empire, studying its peculiarities, personnel and methods. The *Condition of India*, for example, includes investigations into colonial prisons instead of cadastral surveys, dissects colonial law rather than native customs and instead of an anthropological study of the castes and tribes of India, investigates one particular collectivity: the colonial police and its habits of violence.⁴¹⁴

The anticolonial version provides insights into aspects of empire – such as its reliance on violence – where colonial archives might be silent or sealed off in Hanslope Park. Equally, the process by which anticolonial knowledge was resisted by the organs of the imperial state reveals the dependence of flawed imperial ideologies upon asymmetries of information and ignorance production, or agnotology. In this sense, anticolonial knowledge is both intrinsically and instrumentally useful to historical research: it tells us things about the history of colonialism but the way in which it speaks, and is silenced, is equally revealing of both itself, and of empire. This chapter examines the dialectical interaction between anticolonial knowledge making and imperial agnotology in three cases. The first is the 1932 India League delegation visit to India, which carefully recorded the violence unleashed by Britain’s ‘Dual Policy’ towards India. The India Office and Government of India then sought to actively suppress this knowledge in Britain through a campaign of repression and agnotological ‘exceptioning:’ making an exception of every example of imperial excess – usually performative colonial violence – that the India League uncovered. The second is the India League’s campaign of parliamentary question-asking which brought to light the violence and authoritarianism of colonial governmentality, imposing a rare accountability on the *Raj* and even circumscribing its authoritarian instincts. The subversive power of anticolonial knowledge-making is further examined through the establishment of the India-Burma Association (IBA). By the middle of the 1940s the India League’s campaign was seen as so

⁴¹⁴ IL, COI, 159-244 and 411-420.

dangerously subversive by the India Office that they began operating their own anti-India League, the IBA, which was funded by British business interests in India to actively disseminate the imperial version of empire that was being dangerously undermined by the India League's own anticolonial knowledge-making, which inadvertently demonstrates its effectiveness and reach.

The 1932 *Condition of India* Delegation

Besant had felt that the brutal facts of colonial rule were little known to the British because they had been 'covered up by officials.'⁴¹⁵ This instinct was not confined to *official* secrecy: A speech at a 1930 India League meeting denounced the 'censorship of news by the proprietors of the "Yellow Press"' who were engaged in 'the shielding of British interests in India.'⁴¹⁶ This claim was correct: the India Office and Government of India devoted considerable resources to censorship, had a repressive system in place to deal with the Indian Press and a cosy relationship with Reuters, thus preventing embarrassing stories or critiques from reaching Britain.⁴¹⁷ If critical stories reached Britain nonetheless, there was still a well-established journalistic practice of seeking 'balance' between them and official views which helped colonial officials decide what the 'objective' truth was about the British empire.⁴¹⁸ While the India League was kept informed by private correspondence, much of this was lost to postal censors and so they complained that the 'information we get from India is very scanty.'⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁵ Annie Besant, *India: A Nation*, xvii.

⁴¹⁶ ENSYR, 25.6.1930, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/356.

⁴¹⁷ Chandrika Kaul, *Reporting the Raj; the British press and India c. 1880-1922*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 46.

⁴¹⁸ See Nicholas Owen, "Facts Are Sacred": The Manchester Guardian and Colonial Violence, 1930-1932.' *The Journal of Modern History*, 3: 84 (2012), 643-78.

⁴¹⁹ Menon to Mohan Madan Malaviya, 23.4.1932, NMML/KMP/567.

In her study of the interwar covert empire in the Middle East, Priya Satia makes use of the term ‘agnotology’ as ‘coined by Robert Proctor, a historian of science, who used it to describe the tobacco industry’s systematic cultivation of ignorance about the harmful effects of cigarettes.’ She finds the term a ‘useful means of describing the strategy behind official secrecy about empire in an age of mass democracy.’⁴²⁰ For Proctor, agnotology is the study of deliberately or socially produced doubt and ignorance that reveals the ‘historicity and artifactuality of non-knowing.’⁴²¹ This can be distinguished from false belief by its *deliberate* production, which evokes Charles Mill’s notion of a racialised ignorance that does not passively retreat in the face of enlightenment, but ‘fights back.’⁴²² Based on this, ‘an agnotological approach seeks to dissect the ignorance production methods and tactics of messengers of disinformation’⁴²³ which might include censorship but also propaganda, especially that which manufactures doubt. Agnotological studies generally investigate the power and interests served by the production of ignorance: Paul Gilroy calls for ‘a new corrective disciplinary perspective that interprets the power that arises from the command of *not knowing*.’⁴²⁴ In the case of India, the importance of the power of ‘not knowing’ can be seen by its institutionalised into specialised and global agnotological bureaucracies of censorship, surveillance and propaganda. This included IPI, the Delhi Intelligence Bureau and the Information Officers of both the Government of India and the India Office in London. These sought to control the information about the *Raj* that flowed from the authoritarian colony to a liberal Britain increasingly characterised by mass democracy. Both Satia and Mills argue that one the most comprehensive project of historical ignorance-making has been

⁴²⁰ Priya Satia ‘Inter-War agnotology: empire, democracy and the production of ignorance’, *Brave New World: Imperial and Democratic Nation-Building in Britain between the Wars* ed. Laura Beers and Thomas Geraint (University of London Press, 2011), 218, see also Robert Proctor, *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

⁴²¹ Robert N. Proctor ‘Postscript on the Coining of the Term “Agnotology”’, *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* ed. Robert Proctor and Londa Schiebinger (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 27.

⁴²² Charles Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁴²³ Tom Slater ‘Agnotology’, *Keywords in Radical Geography: Antipode at 50*, eds. Antipode Editorial Collective (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley 7 Sons), 21.

⁴²⁴ Paul Gilroy, *The Crises of Multiculturalism?*, conference proceeding at the London School of Economics (5.2009).

about the excessive nature of colonial violence⁴²⁵ and it was not just in relation to India that excessive colonial violence and metropolitan silencing formed part of the same structure. After the Croke Park massacre of 1920, where British auxiliary policemen marched into a stadium and started shooting Irish civilians, killing two children in the process, the House of Commons would only discuss Irish attacks on the British. When Joseph Devlin, an Irish MP, raised a question about Croke Park, British MPs bellowed at him to sit down and he was physically assaulted in the Chamber by a Conservative MP, Major Molson.⁴²⁶

Antoinette Burton has written of the struggle to ‘develop a counterinsurgency policy’⁴²⁷ in Ireland that ‘generally met the test of liberal acceptability in Britain’⁴²⁸ of which Croke Park was clearly a major failure. One wonders what Molson would have done to an Indian MP rising in the imperial parliament to protest the imperial massacre of the previous year, in Amritsar. India provided a similar dilemma as Ireland after Gandhi’s mass campaign of non-violent civil disobedience prompted *both* a rise in repressive state violence and a renaissance of liberal imperialism as an increasingly necessary justification for empire in the face his challenge.⁴²⁹ This made imperial agnotology increasingly important to an imperial rule riven by contradiction but also offered opportunities that anticolonial activists such as the India League could exploit. Burton, quoting the Chartist Ernest Jones, who said that ‘the blood ever dried’ in the British Empire, asks ‘how and under what conditions that blood made noise.’⁴³⁰ For the India League, therefore, the purpose of anticolonial knowledge-making was the enablement of that spilt blood to speak the truth about empire. This task was difficult because routine attacks on Indians often failed to provoke any outrage in Britain. It was only after a

⁴²⁵ Charles Mills ‘Global White Ignorance’ *Routledge Book of Ignorance Studies*, eds. Matthias Gross and Linsey McGoey (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2015), 222 and Priya Satia ‘Inter-War agnotology,’ 218.

⁴²⁶ HC Deb, 22.11.1920, vol. 135 col. 38.

⁴²⁷ Antoinette Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, 162.

⁴²⁸ Cited in Antoinette Burton, *Trouble with Empire*, 162.

⁴²⁹ Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 11.

⁴³⁰ Antoinette Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, 9.

British priest, the Reverend Forrester Paton (who often wore Indian clothes) had been 'beaten, wounded in the ribs, legs and arms and then drenched with coloured water,'⁴³¹ by the colonial police that there was a scandal in Britain, including questions in Parliament.⁴³² This is a reminder of the enduring power and racial constitution of colonial difference: it was only when a Briton was treated as an Indian that the scandal of empire's violence was made.

Encouraged by this, perhaps, the India League was planning an exhibition on colonial violence to be held in the House of Commons. This included a sample *lathi*, the iron-bound wooden truncheon used by the colonial police to attack *satyagrahis*. This exhibition was based on Menon's fear that 'most people [in Britain] think a *lathi* is a light piece of bamboo which cannot even hurt the skin.'⁴³³ Peter Freeman, a chairman of the India League, had visited India and brought a *lathi* back to show at public meetings. Menon believed 'the most effective part of his argument was the *lathi* which he showed to his audience and banged on the table. People were horrorstruck [sic]. We have therefore decided to plan an exhibition... showing the weapons and methods used in the maintenance of law and order in India.'⁴³⁴ The exhibition would also include photographs of police atrocities and of injured persons, 'originals or copies of orders of a particularly iniquitous nature,' as well as evidence of 'government attacks on the Red Cross' and 'places of worship, including Moslem mosques' as well as 'attacks on children and boys.'⁴³⁵ The India League also enjoyed the cooperation of several Labour MPs who used parliamentary questions and speeches to spread its anticolonial knowledge. Menon managed to have David Grenfell MP read out an 'eleven hundred word cable' that accused the British government of presenting a picture of India that was 'incorrect and misleading' because the reality was 'brutal revolting repression' where 'volunteers beaten

⁴³¹ T.J.S. George, *Krishna Menon*, 76.

⁴³² HC Deb 29.2.1932, vol. 262, col. 752.

⁴³³ Menon to M.M. Malaviya, 23.4 1932, NMML/KMP/567.

⁴³⁴ Menon to M.M. Malaviya, 2.4.1932 NMML/KMP/567.

⁴³⁵ IPI, 'copy of a strictly confidential memorandum, No. 1196/C from Madras Special Branch', 21.4.1932, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/448.

half dead then left on road stripped of all clothes...persons beaten even after their becoming senseless...even small boys whipped.’⁴³⁶ The telegram had been provided to the India League by a Congress leader, Mohan Madan Malaviya⁴³⁷ which was a small miracle given the activity of the censors.⁴³⁸ The speech alarmed the India Office⁴³⁹ but the problem remained that even if the League managed, despite all the odds, to lay such information before the House of Commons it could be easily dismissed by the Secretary of State citing the authority of government information. Menon conveyed an example of this to Malaviya, noting how an ‘MP who has come back from India tells the same tale of repression... but of course Lord Lothian [Under-Secretary of State for India] can “correct” all this if he is so inclined.’ The problem was that India League-affiliated MPs might not have even visited India, making their account appear less credible than the seemingly authoritative one provided by Ministers or retired colonial officers now sitting on the Conservative backbenches. To overcome this the League found ‘that what is wanted is that there should be someone who can stand up in the Chamber itself and challenge the Secretary of State on personal knowledge. We are therefore considering the idea of proposing a deputation consisting of at least one MP.’⁴⁴⁰ A visiting Labour delegation had rejected Dublin Castle’s version of Croke Park (that the IRA shot first): maybe the Party would afford India the same favour.

It was Madeleine Slade, however, the spiritual devotee of Gandhi (whom the Mahatma had renamed Mira Behn) who originally wrote to the India League, suggesting that a delegation be sent to the subcontinent. Mira felt that the official and press version being presented in Britain bore no resemblance to the horrors of colonial state violence in India.⁴⁴¹ At this point it is crucial to note that the violence that she was witnessing was *deliberately* created as one

⁴³⁶ HC Deb, 20.3.1939, vol. 263 col. 1209.

⁴³⁷ Menon to M.M. Malaviya, 6.3.1932, NMML/KMP/567.

⁴³⁸ Govind Malaviya to Menon, 6.1.1932, NMML/KMP/567.

⁴³⁹ Menon to M.M. Malaviya, 18.3.1932, NMML/KMP/567.

⁴⁴⁰ Menon to M.M. Malaviya, 9.4.1932, NMML/KMP/567.

⁴⁴¹ Mira Behn to Tom Williams, 7,8 and 9.1.1932, NMML/KMP/566.

wing of the Dual Policy. The other wing was also the latest episode in India's process of constitutional reform. After the 1857 revolution compelled the Crown to take power from the East India Company, successive Acts had involved a few Indians in advisory councils while ultimately preserving the absolute power of the Viceroy and Governors. In 1909 and again in 1919 Liberal Secretaries of State increased Indian representation in assemblies of limited power, accompanied by an emerging system of 'dyarchy' where the pleasanter portfolios (sanitation, education, public works) might be transferred to Indian ministers while the commanding heights of finance and security, along with considerable reserve powers of veto and overriding promulgation remained vested in British Governors. The 1919 reforms had also included the provision for a decennial review, which was brought forward by the Conservatives to keep in out of the hands of Labour⁴⁴² (and Indians⁴⁴³) and took the form all-British Simon Commission. This was boycotted in India and produced some limited proposals to which the new Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, refused to be bound. He instead summoned a series of Round Table Conferences to discuss progress towards dominion status which he intended to include the all-important power of 'responsibility at the centre.'⁴⁴⁴ Congress had boycotted the first Conference, only been allowed to send a single delegate (Gandhi) to the second, and was banned during the third, which was also boycotted by Labour, reducing it to a farce. Meanwhile, Labour weakness and then the formation of the National Government meant that Conservatives were increasingly able to dominate proceedings. Amidst a widespread diehard revolt led by Winston Churchill, Sir Samuel Hoare, the new Secretary of State for India, produced the 1935 Government of India Act. This was drafted by a Joint Parliamentary Committee which contained no Indians at all and limited 'responsibility' to the provinces. It made no mention of the promised 'dominion

⁴⁴² Lord Birkenhead to Lord Reading, 10.12.1925, BL/IOR/L/PO/6/22.

⁴⁴³ Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 89.

⁴⁴⁴ James Ramsay MacDonald, diary entry, 23.11.1931, cited in David Marquand, *James Ramsay Macdonald* (London: Richard Cohen, 1977), 708.

status' and ensured that the next step, an all-India Federation, was conditional on the voluntary involvement of the reliably loyalist Indian princes. Federation never actually happened and elections to the reformed assemblies were only called in 1937, resulting in a Congress landslide and then two years later (justified by war) the Act's major concessions were annulled at a stroke.

As the Home Member of the Government of India, Harry Haig, put it, the reaching of 'practical conclusions about the constitution [was]... the constructive side of the "dual policy" side by side with this we must maintain the other wing of this dual policy, we must defeat the menace of civil disobedience.'⁴⁴⁵ This was achieved by promulgating an Emergency Powers Ordinance which Haig described as 'a species of martial law administered by civil officers.'⁴⁴⁶ This horrified the Labour Secretary of State, Wedgwood Benn and his Tory successor, Hoare, though the latter was soon won round.⁴⁴⁷ Conventional legal theory holds civil and martial law far apart and by smashing them together, the Dual Policy was a typical fudge between liberal imperialism and violent colonial rule. It was also fairly common: after 1923 the British always had some version of Martial Law lurking in draft form,⁴⁴⁸ raising its head in places like Sholapur, while the army was often called out to aid the civil power.

What is unique about the colonial situation is that performative state violence was a function of liberalism rather than its antithesis. To take an example, the 1919 reforms had been accompanied by the Rowlatt Act which sought to normalise repressive wartime regulations to

⁴⁴⁵ Haig to Mieville, 13.4.1932, BL/IOR/Mss. EUR F115/1.

⁴⁴⁶ Haig to Innes, 18.6.1932, National Archives of India, Home (Political) Series (hereafter: NAI/Home/Pol.)

⁴⁴⁷ D.A. Low "Civil Martial Law:" The Government of India and the Civil Disobedience Movement 1930-1934,' *Congress and the Raj* ed. D.A. Low, 173.

⁴⁴⁸ D.A. Low 'Introduction', *Congress and the Raj*, 4.

‘defend the process of constitutional reforms from those who might threaten it.’⁴⁴⁹ State violence was used to mop up any Indian politics that overspilled the safety of the reformed institutions. These ‘black acts,’ as Congress called them, were bitterly opposed and repealed (among other repressive measures) in 1922 without ever actually being implemented. Thus, the Dual Policy implemented ‘the first ever comprehensive Emergency Powers Ordinance the British ever issued’⁴⁵⁰ under the Crown, in peacetime and on an all-India basis. This would violently defeat civil disobedience and thereby entice moderates and compel Congress into working the ‘new constitution’⁴⁵¹ being drafted in London. The Indian press was crushed, Congress proscribed, and its methods criminalised. Local officials were given draconian powers to arbitrarily detain or internally exile Indians, deprive them of property and harshly restrict their lives. The ability of the courts to review these acts was heavily curtailed, effectively indemnifying the colonial state from its spiralling excesses.⁴⁵² Hoare admitted that the ordinances underpinning civil martial law were ‘drastic and severe’ in that ‘they cover almost every activity of Indian life.’⁴⁵³ They appear to have exercised as tight a control over India as martial law would have, save only that the police did not formally hand over the responsibility of maintaining order to the army, lest that produce the fatal scandal of another Amritsar. Between this extreme and the deficiencies of the ordinary court-and-prison system (liable to become deliberately clogged by *satyagrahis*), ‘civil martial law’ finessed a new form of violence: the ‘*lathi-charge*’ which was a public attack on protestors by baton-wielding police. This was designed to injure deter, but not kill, Indian protestors. By avoiding the scandal of countable dead bodies, the colonial state could mask the intrinsic violence of the dual policy, although air and firepower were still used for certain social groups.⁴⁵⁴ The

⁴⁴⁹ Durba Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists: Political Violence and the Colonial State in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 32-33.

⁴⁵⁰ DA Low “Civil Martial Law”, 174.

⁴⁵¹ Haig to Mieville, 13.4.1932, cited in D.A. Low “Civil Marital Law”, 178.

⁴⁵² For the text of the Ordinances, see NAI/Home/Pol. F13-14 ii (1932).

⁴⁵³ HC Deb, 24.3.1932, vol. 263 col. 1226.

⁴⁵⁴ Taylor C. Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 77.

Viceroy was sanguine about the effects of colonial violence: stating candidly that his officials were ‘getting their own back.’⁴⁵⁵ D.A. Low puts it best: ‘If this was the Viceroy’s view, attitudes lower down may be readily imagined.’⁴⁵⁶

Thus, the two wings of the Dual Policy concretized the contrast and contradiction between the self-image of liberal imperialism (denoted by the Round Table Conference) and the violent reality of colonial rule. Based on this, the India League had appealed to the Labour Party not to participate in the ‘constitutional process’ because that implied that the party was ‘consenting to the method of trying to affect a “constitutional settlement” with the bayonet and the *lathi* in full play at the same time.’⁴⁵⁷ In late June the India League held a meeting on the Dual Policy at the House of Commons which drew ‘a very large number of Members of Parliament’ who were addressed by Laski and Lansbury. Lansbury argued that the Government’s aim was to ‘crush the Congress Party’ through a ‘policy of continued repression’ alongside a ‘settlement of constitutional issues without consultation or negotiation.’ Laski dismissed the constitutional wing of the Dual Policy as unrepresentative and argued that Britain governed India ‘nakedly by the sword’ under the ‘ancient philosophy’ that racially separated and sanctioned violence against Indians by the assumption that ‘the Indian mind only understands the strong hand.’ In countering Hoare’s assertion that the ordinances would be lawful, proportionate and necessary, in that they ‘will operate when the situation demands’ Laski invoked the ghosts of Jallianwala Bagh, with which he was intimately connected due to his involvement in the O’Dwyer-Nair libel trial: ‘from reading in great detail the history of the Punjab under martial law in 1919 I know how such powers can be abused.’⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁵ Cited in D.A. Low “Civil Martial Law”, 174.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid, 174.

⁴⁵⁷ Menon to Lansbury, 26.1.1932, NMML/KMP/419.

⁴⁵⁸ India League, Memorandum: Meeting Held at the House of Commons, 28.6.1932, NMML/KMP/187.

Before a delegation could be formed to investigate this violence, however, funds had to be secured and the League was, as ever, broke. When the Malaviya family was asked for support from India, the response was that ‘people are not unwilling to contribute’ and that ‘many would give us thousands’ but the ‘ordinances are being so... vindictively enforced that anyone who contributes anything does not part with that amount alone but actually authorizes thereby the authorities to confiscate...all that he may possess.’⁴⁵⁹ An appeal for funds went out in Britain June 1932, signed by Laski, C.F. Andrews, Russell and others⁴⁶⁰ but by July the League had failed to raise any substantial funds in Britain and so the Malaviyas⁴⁶¹ and the industrialist Birla family took the risk of furnishing funds from India.⁴⁶² In accordance with the long-standing strategy to largely ‘appear British’ the India League had a preference for the delegation to consist of sitting Labour MPs or Peers as they were the most suited to refuting the claims made by the Secretary of State and would be well placed to ‘make a breach in public opinion.’⁴⁶³ Owing to an emergency recall of Parliament no sitting MP was available and so the League settled on Menon himself, Ellen Wilkinson, Monica Whately and the left-wing journalist, Leonard Matters. Monica Whately was then Vice-President of the Labour Candidates Association and Menon described her as a ‘member of the British governing classes...a very effective speaker and one of the foremost women in the militant suffragette struggle.’⁴⁶⁴ It was Wilkinson, however, that represented the real coup for the delegation with Menon noting that she ‘has the *entrée* into the press here and in America. Personally, I think she is worth any three or four other people whom we might send.’⁴⁶⁵ Both the India Office and the Government of India feared the public and parliamentary reaction to

⁴⁵⁹ Govind Malaviya to Menon, 9.5.1932, NMML/KMP/567.

⁴⁶⁰ IPI to Nott-Bower, 12.7.1932, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/448.

⁴⁶¹ M.M. Malaviya to India League, 3.7.1932, NMML/KMP/567.

⁴⁶² Unsigned (likely Menon or J.F. Horrabin) to Malaviya, 9.7.1932, NMML/KMP/567.

⁴⁶³ Menon to M.M. Malaviya, 23.4.1932, NMML/KMP/567.

⁴⁶⁴ Menon to M.M. Malaviya, 9.7.1932, NMML/KMP/567.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

the delegation's report which was presumed to be hostile⁴⁶⁶ particularly in left-wing circles as they aware of the delegation's prominence with the Labour Party.⁴⁶⁷ The India Office therefore wrote to the Government of India, outlining the agnotological strategy of giving the delegation 'an opportunity of acquiring correct information and being animated by a broad official perspective.'⁴⁶⁸

Examining the evidence the League collected in India permits a useful opportunity to examine the nature of colonial violence by bringing it into conversation with critical theorisations of the lawless and exemplary state violence generated by the rule of colonial difference. Equally, the very act of anticolonial witnessing forced the empire into an active position of denial, laying bare its dependence on both exemplary violence and its simultaneous disavowal. This was achieved through the agnotological strategy of making an exception out of every demonstrable case of state violence. As the India League delegation travelled through 12,000 miles of British India, visiting every province bar one, the Government of India was forced to admit the failure of their agnotological strategy. Madras Presidency even admitted that the delegation 'lived in an atmosphere of civil disobedience throughout their stay' and that 'the delegation were everywhere confronted with stories of police excesses.'⁴⁶⁹ The delegation rejected the widespread claim that 'the police are conducting themselves with great restraint, that the measures are necessary to maintain law and order...and that only minimum force required is used.'⁴⁷⁰ They cited 'medical certificates' which gave 'particulars of injuries of head, chest and limbs, of death resulting from police beatings, samples of which we have in our possession, [which] belie this "minimum force" argument.' They found 'that in several places hospitals which received

⁴⁶⁶ William Peel to Maurice Hallett, 14.8.1932, NAI/Home/Pol./40/XII/1932.

⁴⁶⁷ Peel to Hallett, 5.8.1932, NAI/Home/Pol./40/XII/1932.

⁴⁶⁸ Hallett to Stewart, 4.7.1932, NAI/Home/Pol./40/XII/1932.

⁴⁶⁹ Hallett to Clauson, 10.08.1932 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/448.

⁴⁷⁰ IL, COI, 163.

government aid would not render medical assistance to the victims of police excesses.’⁴⁷¹

Interestingly, the delegation found the colonial state of emergency in India to represent not the suspension of law, but rather its intensification into something they called ‘lawless law.’⁴⁷²

This anticipates Caroline Elkins’ idea of ‘legalised lawlessness’⁴⁷³ or even what Nasser Hussain calls ‘hyperlegality’:⁴⁷⁴ the position where a flurry of laws, ordinances, immunisations, tacit permissions and legalised exceptions culminates, as Deana Heath argues, in the legalised ‘power to undertake whatever exceptional means are deemed necessary.’⁴⁷⁵ In the absence of a global language of human rights, the delegation lamented how this produced the ‘unlawful and according to British ideas, thoroughly unjustified way in which police are allowed to take the law into their own hands’ because they were not ‘answerable before a court of law’ as under the law ‘the Indian Government indemnifies its police and officials in advance.’⁴⁷⁶ The result was that un-British ‘rule appears more arbitrary than even a martial law regime when police, military and district civil officers may shoot people dead or order firing and no inquiry is held after the incident.’⁴⁷⁷ This matches the colonial ‘man on the spot’ to Judith Butler’s description of ‘petty sovereigns’:⁴⁷⁸ the dispersal of sovereign power over life and death into innumerable administrative figures which then reduces those that are subordinated to them to what she calls a ‘precarious life.’ The delegation recorded numerous examples of the precarious life produced by the British in India: In Hashanabad ‘the police opened fire, killing two and wounding many others. Three of the wounded died in hospital later.’⁴⁷⁹ In Mamlatdar a female protestor recounted how, even though they ‘made no resistance and were not violent...they were struck from behind by the police as they were

⁴⁷¹ Ibid, 210.

⁴⁷² Ibid, 49.

⁴⁷³ Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: a history of the British Empire* (London: Vintage, 2022), 140.

⁴⁷⁴ Nasser Hussain, ‘Hyperlegality’, *New Criminal Law Review*, 10: 4 (2007), 514-531.

⁴⁷⁵ Deana Heath, *Colonial Terror: Torture and State Violence in Colonial India*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 55.

⁴⁷⁶ IL, COI, 168.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid, 191.

⁴⁷⁸ See Judith Butler, *Prekarious Life: The powers of mourning and violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

⁴⁷⁹ IL, COI, 188.

marched off.⁴⁸⁰ The delegation saw a ‘procession soon surrounded by police constables. British sergeants then “charged” the Congress volunteers, which is the name apparently given to the merciless beating with *lathis* that we witnessed.’⁴⁸¹ Thus, the delegation witnessed the transformation of Indians by the British into a version of Giorgio Agamben’s *homo sacer*: a paradoxical creature so encased in colonial law as to be completely outside it.⁴⁸²

In Bochestan, the delegation witnessed a procession which ‘consisted mainly of women’ being subject to ‘the most savage beating...Policemen swung their five-foot *lathis* with both hands and delivered blows on the heads and shoulders. It was a ruthless *performance* [my emphasis], savage in the fury with which the police delivered the blows.’⁴⁸³ A local magistrate offered as a reason for the violence the need that ‘others must be shown that they can’t do this sort of thing.’⁴⁸⁴ This was not confined to a single incident: the general argument was that the use of *lathis* was legitimate as a ‘deterrence against the continuance of picketing’ To the delegation this was unacceptable as ‘the use of force as a “deterrent”...is contrary to all accepted notions of administering law.’⁴⁸⁵ Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias have argued that such performative spectacles of state violence were replaced over the nineteenth century in Europe by an instrumentalised violence that was minimised to what was needed to maintain the ‘disciplined society.’⁴⁸⁶ This then became an increasingly important component of the legitimation of the state and its claims upon its citizens.⁴⁸⁷ Liberal empires, on the other hand, justified themselves with the claim that they were holding down a natural propensity to internecine violence among their savage subjects. As John McGuire points out,

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid, 197.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid, 182.

⁴⁸² Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁴⁸³ IL, COI, 170.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid, 197.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid, 168.

⁴⁸⁶ Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process: State formation & civilisation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), 238 and Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* trans Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991).

⁴⁸⁷ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022 edition), 17.

however, in the case of Australia, public executions (a form of performative violence) were phased out in the nineteenth century, but an exception was made as they were *brought back* for the execution of native Australians, especially those accused of murdering a European. Native audiences would even be specially transported to witness the spectacle. This was because public executions were held to have a tutelary or deterrent effect on racially essentialised (and often criminalised) native populations.⁴⁸⁸ Colonial state violence was therefore excessive⁴⁸⁹ and exceeded that of other state formations partly due to paranoia and a failure to establish legitimacy⁴⁹⁰ but mostly because of Laski's 'ancient philosophy' of the strong hand which Kim Wagner has described as 'the...logic of [colonial] difference insisting that brute force was the only language natives understand.'⁴⁹¹ After General Dyer killed hundreds of unarmed Indian civilians in Amritsar in 1919, his defence provided the most infamous crystallisation of this logic: 'I fired and continued to fire until the crowd dispersed, and I consider this the least amount of firing which could produce the necessary moral and widespread effect.'⁴⁹² This notion of necessity was not confined to Dyer: the view of Michael O'Dwyer, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, was that 'the Amritsar business cleared the air, and if there was to be holocaust anywhere, and one regrets that there should be, it was best at Amritsar.'⁴⁹³ The Conservative Home Secretary, William Joynson-Hicks, was also a defender of Dyer and made Britain's dependence on colonial violence explicit:

We did not conquer India for the benefit of the Indians. I know it is said at missionary meetings that we conquered India to raise the level of the Indians. That is cant. We

⁴⁸⁸ See John McGuire 'Judicial Violence and the 'civilising process': u Race and the transition from public to private executions in Colonial Australia', *Australian Historical Studies*, 29: 111 (1998), 187-209.

⁴⁸⁹ See Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence*.

⁴⁹⁰ Violence was cheaper than manufacturing consent through an expensive state apparatus, see Dierk Walter, *Colonial Violence: European Empires and Their Use of Force* (London: Hurst, 2017).

⁴⁹¹ Kim Wagner, 'Savage Warfare: Violence and the Rule of Colonial Difference in Early British Counterinsurgency' *History Workshop Journal*, 85 (2018), 217-237, 231 See also Rudrangshu Mukherjee, "'Satan Let Loose Upon the Earth: The Kanpur Massacres in India in the Revolt of 1857,' *Past and Present*, 128, (1990), 92-116, 183.

⁴⁹² *Report on the Committee...to investigate the Disturbances in the Punjab etc.* (London: HMSO. Cmd. 681. 1920), 1088.

⁴⁹³ Kim Wagner, *Amritsar 1919: An Empire of Fear and the Making of a Massacre* (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 2019), 256.

conquered India as the outlet for the goods of Great Britain. We conquered India by the sword and by the sword we should hold it.⁴⁹⁴

In reference to his speech, the *Socialist Standard* described Hicks as ‘a politician who frequently embarrasses his own party and class by making indiscreet disclosures of things which a ruling class finds it better to act upon than to talk about.’⁴⁹⁵ Contemporaries could clearly see through the duplicity of the un-British Empire. Joynson-Hicks was speaking in relation to the *O’Dwyer v Nair* libel trial. This followed from Sir Sankaran Nair’s accusation that O’Dwyer promoted state terrorism. As we have seen, a juror on the case was Laski, who recalled the concession made in court that ‘Indians could be whipped and made to crawl down streets on hands and knees’ but those methods would not ‘*be appropriate for British people* [my emphasis].’⁴⁹⁶ Clearly this could not be entirely admitted to. After Amritsar produced extensive outrage, Winston Churchill attempted to contain it by arguing that it was ‘an extraordinary event, a monstrous event, an event which stands in singular and sinister isolation.’⁴⁹⁷ Purnima Bose calls this the ‘rogue-colonial individualism’ argument where a ‘specific person is scapegoated...through the censure of the most egregious offenders of colonial brutality such as General Dyer, the authoritarian nature of colonial rule is obscured by the trappings of...democracy.’⁴⁹⁸ This was an argument that the India League was always having to refute: Michael Carritt told a 1941 League meeting that while ‘Amritsar was now a symbol representing a decisive step in the Independence movement’ what was ‘of more importance today were the “little Amritsars” which were constantly occurring.’ The other speakers at the meeting – Anand and Menon – confirmed that Dyer ‘was merely one of others, that he was the natural product of the imperialist system, and that his mentality was

⁴⁹⁴ *Daily News*, 17.8.1925.

⁴⁹⁵ *Socialist Standard*, 9.19.25.

⁴⁹⁶ Isaac Kramnick and Barry Sheerman, *Harold Laski*, 220.

⁴⁹⁷ HC. Deb, 8.7.1920, vol. 131, col. 1825.

⁴⁹⁸ Purnima Bose, *Organizing Empire: Individualism, Collective Agency, and India* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 31.

not a strange phenomenon.⁴⁹⁹ Against the denial by ‘rogue-colonial individualism,’ not to mention the long-standing tendency of imperial historiography to remain silent on the issue of colonial violence,⁵⁰⁰ the Amritsar massacre has now attracted a productive density of scholarship pointing to the ways in which it was not the exception to the modalities of British colonial state violence in India, as was pretended at the time.⁵⁰¹ This is partly because agnotological disavowal-through-exceptioning leaves the *practice* of performative colonial state violence largely intact: Nasser Hussain notes how the Hunter Commission (convened to investigate the Amritsar massacre) found the ‘object of performative violence’ to be ‘everywhere disavowed’ and yet ‘foundational.’⁵⁰² This reveals the paradox of colonial state violence: that, according to its own terms, in order to successfully uphold colonialism it must be exemplary while remaining an exception.

Giorgio Agamben has famously used the ‘state of exception’⁵⁰³ to theorise the co-existence of liberal democracy with instances of state repression and illiberal violence in the camp and elsewhere, which might appear to map neatly on to wings of the Dual Policy. Stephen Morton has argued, however, that one of the limits of Agamben’s theory is how it ‘fails to consider... how colonial sovereignty was experienced as a permanent state of emergency from the standpoint of the colonised.’⁵⁰⁴ Achille Mbembe has described the European colony as the

⁴⁹⁹ IPI to Silver, 17.4.1941, BL/IOR/L/PJ/618.

⁵⁰⁰ Richard Drayton, ‘Where Does the World Historian Write From? Objectivity, Moral Conscience and the Past and Present of Imperialism.’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46: 3 (2011), 671–85. The silence is now shattered: See, for example Jordanna Bailikin, ‘The Boot and the Spleen: When Was Murder Possible in British India?’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48: 2 (2006), 462–93, Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2022), Deana Heath, *Colonial terror: Torture and state violence in colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), Elizabeth Kolsky, *Colonial Justice in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), John Newsinger, *The Blood Never Dried: A People’s History of the British Empire* (London: Bookmarks, 2006).

⁵⁰¹ See for example Helen Fine, *Imperial crime and punishment: The massacre at Jallianwala Bagh and British judgment, 1919–1920*. (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1977) and Kim Wagner, *Amritsar 1919: An empire of fear & the making of a massacre*. (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 2019).

⁵⁰² Nasser Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: colonialism and the rule of law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 131.

⁵⁰³ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*. Although Agamben’s work has been criticised for its inapplicability to colonial cases, it has been well-used by scholars to explore the interaction between universalism, law and colonial violence. See Deana Heath, *Colonial terror: Torture and state violence in colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) and Elizabeth Kolsky, ‘The Colonial Rule of Law and the Legal Regime of Exception: Frontier “Fanaticism” and State Violence in British India.’ *The American Historical Review* 120: 4 (2015), 1218–246 For a more general application of Agamben’s theory to colonialism see Simone Bignall and Marcelo Svirsky (eds.) *Agamben and colonialism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

⁵⁰⁴ Stephen Morton ‘Reading Kenya’s Colonial State of Emergency after Agamben’ in Simone Bignall and Marcelo Svirsky (eds.) *Agamben and colonialism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 112.

‘the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended – the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of “civilization.”⁵⁰⁵ Thus, the ‘constitutional wing’ of the Dual Policy provided the cover of legitimate, reforming liberal governance that justified the violence repression of ‘illegitimate’ civil disobedience. Colonial violence, in turn, could be presented as a necessary state of exception to the latter, permitting it to pose as the norm of empire. The question remains as to whether the Dual Policy was itself a state of exception to the norms of colonial rule, or an intensification of normal practices. My view is that it is concentric: a state of exception within the state of exception that was colonial rule itself. To contemporaries, as Morton suggests, it would have depended on perspective: For the colonised it was business as usual, if more brutal, but to the coloniser the violence of the Dual Policy was necessarily an exception to their benevolent, civilising, liberal imperial rule. Thus, the India League encountered the interaction of two powerful exceptions operating in India: the colonial state of exception which enabled exemplary violence and agnotological exceptioning, which concealed it.

The India League, like the Hunter Commission, found violence to be foundational to British rule in India. The *Condition of India* includes a quote by Dewan Bahadur H. Sarada, a retired judge and member of the Legislative Assembly who had moved away from a position of collaboration with the Government of India to one of opposition:

I fail to find out under what law a man who sits on the side of the road can be assaulted with a *lathi* or fired at. Arrest and imprison him. There is now nothing but the rule of *lathis* in the land.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁵ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 23.

⁵⁰⁶ IL, COI, 177.

The *lathi raj* was deliberately performative: the Bengal Government insisted upon ‘unequivocal ocular proof, that Government is determined to assert itself and to crush the subversive movement of which Congress is the sponsor.’⁵⁰⁷ As such, the *lathi raj* was calculated to create the ‘necessary moral and widespread effect’ and so the Dual Policy was nothing but the continuation of Amritsar by other, less fatal, means. The problem for a colonial state whose governmentality has been reduced to the performative violence (‘ocular proof’) of the *lathi raj* was, as Taylor Sherman puts it, that ‘by using punishments for essentially spectacular purposes, governments in India helped transform penal practice into political spectacle’ which could backfire as ‘these acts of violence became battlegrounds for representation.’⁵⁰⁸ The India League, like Congress, was fighting on this discursive battleground and was well-placed to perceive the agnotological strategy of its opponent. This was ‘a conspiracy of silence and wilful ignorance on the part of officials’⁵⁰⁹ demonstrated by the ‘instructions given [by the Government of India] ...that we were not to see beatings; that we were not allowed to see beatings. But we did see *lathi* beating – when boys were beaten into unconsciousness. We had those boys carried into our bungalow; we tended them.’⁵¹⁰ The delegation soon noticed that police behaviour changed when they knew the delegation was there: they were only able to witness the Bochestan violence by arriving ‘before daybreak’ so that the ‘police did not know we were in the place; we were well hidden by the parapet wall.’ In Calicut, the delegation witnessed the police ‘raining a show of *lathi* blows on the volunteers’ however after the police noticed the members of the delegation ‘we saw no more beating.’⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁷ Cited in D.A. Low ‘Civil Martial Law,’ 172.

⁵⁰⁸ Taylor C. Sherman, *State Violence*, 6-7.

⁵⁰⁹ India Office Information Office (hereafter, Inf.), Report on the private meeting arranged to welcome the India League Delegation, 26.11.1932, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

⁵¹⁰ *New Clarion* 14.1.1933.

⁵¹¹ IL, COI, 170.

The contradiction of a colonial state relying on both exemplary violence and its disavowal made for bizarre unrealities. In Mardan, in the militarised North-West Frontier Province, the delegation witnessed a meeting being violently broken by up police who were ‘belabouring them violently with their full-sized *lathis* and hitting men with rifle butts. A number were savagely beaten with the *lathis* swung against their head and bodies. An old man...had his turban snatched, his hands tied up with it and his subjected to a rain of *lathi* blows...We noticed that the pounding on the chest has removed thick layers of skin and tissue...It was a *display* [my emphasis] of wanton and savage force on people who had done no harm, committed no offence or violence, and were not assembled for any unlawful purpose.’⁵¹² This continued, in Ellen Wilkinson’s words, until ‘suddenly an Indian in mufti arrived on a bicycle. There was a sharp order. The police formed into twoes [sic] and marched away...I couldn’t understand why.’⁵¹³ Despite what they had seen, ‘the authorities denied for some little time, even the next day, that there were any police in the area at all.’⁵¹⁴ An official later complained to the delegation that ‘I do not think you have treated us fairly. If you had told us where you were going, we should have given the strictest instructions that no beating was to take place while you were there’ while another admitted that ‘As soon as we knew you were there, word was sent to withdraw the police.’⁵¹⁵ The Police Superintendent was most concerned about the delegation not writing to the papers in Britain about it.⁵¹⁶ The broader official view, communicated to London, was that ‘it is a matter for gratification that worse did not occur’ and the colonial police were to be forgiven because ‘the task of maintaining law and order in a vast subcontinent containing 350 million people, the vast majority of which are ignorant and illiterate [and] in view of the inadequacy of the police force, and the strain and provocation to which its members have so long been exposed [means that] inevitably from

⁵¹² *Ibid*, 417.

⁵¹³ *Tribune*, 28.12.1932.

⁵¹⁴ IL, COI, 425.

⁵¹⁵ *Tribune*, 28.12.1932 and IL, COI, 425.

⁵¹⁶ IL, COI, 425.

time to time be punctuated by unfortunate incidents [my emphasis].⁵¹⁷ This was a clear demonstration of agnotological exceptioning and how it was tightly braided with the ‘ancient philosophy’ of the strong hand. The ‘unfortunate incidents’ were the exception made necessary by native deficiency - the ignorance and illiteracy of Indians (after more than one hundred years of British rule) and not colonialism itself. Other evasive strategies were used, including the blaming of the victims: ‘if any member of the assembly was roughly handled, he had only himself to blame for disobeying police orders.’⁵¹⁸ The delegation also found, to their surprise, that *they* were ‘in the position of being held responsible for the police having run amok’ but that ‘generally the answer to everything is “this is the Frontier.”’⁵¹⁹ Officials, meanwhile, justified their actions to each other by arguing that the ‘necessity for prompt action when crowds of Pathans become unruly requires no emphasis.’⁵²⁰ Elizabeth Kolsky shows how the Frontier and the Pathans that lived there were particular victims of the colonial practice of establishing durable states of exception where colonial punishment was made, not by the universal criteria of juridically demonstrable ‘guilt’ or ‘innocence’ but on the rule of colonial difference: racialised fantasies of the essential savagery or of certain social collectives. In these cases, different legal orders (exceptions) enabled a greater degree of colonial state violence underpinned by a reduced accountability, which was held to be necessary by the alleged propensity to violence of the *colonised*.⁵²¹ Thus, the necessity for excessive, exemplary violence in the Mardan case is derived not just from the nature of colonialism, nor even the particular policing methods of the ordinances and the frontier but is split between a contingent (and false) claim of unruliness and the enduring rule of colonial difference. By being beaten in the street the process of arrest, trial and punishment is

⁵¹⁷ Inf., ‘Report on the India League delegation,’ (n.d., likely 11.1932) BL/IOR/L/I/1/50.

⁵¹⁸ Government of North West Frontier Province to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 15.11.1932, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/448.

⁵¹⁹ IL, COI, 424.

⁵²⁰ I.M. Stephens, ‘Note on the India League Delegation’ n.d., BL/IOR/L/I/1/50.

⁵²¹ Elizabeth Kolsky, ‘The Colonial Rule of Law and the Legal Regime of Exception: Frontier "Fanaticism" and State Violence in British India.’ *The American Historical Review* 120: 4 (2015), 1218-1246.

compressed into a single gesture where exemplary punishment is rendered necessary by the invariant fact of a Pathan being a Pathan. To the coloniser, this was a necessary exception produced by this fact, but from the victim's perspective, the colonial state of exception is permanent because it is generated by a trope of his identity that he can neither escape nor change.

The police struggled to make this argument to the delegation who had, after all, seen the violence happen unprovoked. Instead, they offered the astonishing explanation that 'the police, whom we saw, were probably not police but Red Shirts [members of the *Khudai Khidmatgar*, a Congress-allied anticolonial movement comprised principally of Pathans] dressed in police uniform!' The claim was that they had beaten themselves in order to 'to stage an atrocity.'⁵²² This echoed an earlier argument made to the delegation by a Circle Inspector in Siddapur which held that police violence against women was exaggerated, as shown by a case of where 'one women had beaten all her arrested companions in order to make out that the police beat women.'⁵²³ The delegation predicted that the ridiculous Mardan 'police ballet' would die 'a natural death'⁵²⁴ but it was debated in the provincial legislative assembly and endorsed by senior officials at the India Office in London⁵²⁵ and eventually the Secretary of State for India.⁵²⁶ Thus, under critical pressure, a fantasy was generated by the interaction of the two converging wings of colonial exceptioning. The first was the generation of exemplary colonial violence by concentric states of exception (colonial rule, the ordinances, the frontier, the Pathan) that telescope away from the vision of liberal imperialism performed by the Round Table Conferences in Britain, and which arises from the rule of colonial difference premised on racially essentialised native deficiencies. The second was the

⁵²² *The Tribune*, 28.12.1932.

⁵²³ IL, COI, 197.

⁵²⁴ *The Tribune*, 28.12.1932.

⁵²⁵ Hallet to Peel, 14.11.1932, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/448.

⁵²⁶ *The Tribune*, 28.12.1932.

disavowal of colonial violence by the permanent insistence that it is always the necessary exception to an illusory civilised norm, and this makes the ‘Pathan who beats himself’ an obligatory hallucination when these claims break down under the pressure of anticolonial witnessing.

Upon their return to Britain, the members of the delegation declared that ‘the Round Table Conference is an attempt to delude England.’⁵²⁷ The agnotological bureaucracies of the British Empire now swung into action to preserve that delusion. The India Office was aware that what they were spreading was ignorance because they privately acknowledged the truth of what the India League recorded: An official conceded privately that the delegation’s account in Mardan, for example, ‘had to be taken as truthful, despite diverging from the account of the local police.’⁵²⁸ In a letter to a concerned Graham Pole the private secretary to the Secretary of State for India accused Monica Whately’s account of prison conditions as being ‘imaginative’ while his private handwritten note admitted that ‘there is no reason to suppose that such facts as are stated by Miss Whately...are not substantially correct.’⁵²⁹ More broadly, there were admissions from the highest levels of the Government of India that the delegation did see systemic police brutality.⁵³⁰ Officials held that since ‘it is unlikely that individual allegations will always or often be able to be met with flat and effective replies, the chief desideratum is to discredit the members of the delegation and their claims to reliability.’⁵³¹ Since they were mostly British and had the ‘strong position of eye-witnesses’ the strategy was to argue that their tour was ‘conducted’ by Congress. There were, however, ‘heated denials by the Congress press that the Congress has nothing to do with these visitors’⁵³² and a

⁵²⁷ Inf. ‘Private Report of India League Conference held 26.11.1932,’ 27.11.1932 BL/IOR/L/I/1/50.

⁵²⁸ Matt Perry, *‘Red Ellen’ Wilkinson: Her Ideas, Movements and World*. (New York and Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 232.

⁵²⁹ W.D. Croft to Graham Pole, 6.2.1933, BL/IOR/ L/PJ/12/449.

⁵³⁰ IPI, India League “Labour Delegation” to India, Secret Minute Paper, 16.10.1932, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/448.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² ‘Extract from weekly report of the Director, Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India,’ [Hereafter: DIB/EWR] 24.8.1932 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/448.

Congress bulletin had proclaimed its ‘creed, that India must and will free herself by her own unaided efforts’ and therefore to ‘rely on the help of British socialists’ was ‘criminal stupidity.’⁵³³ A different bulletin noted, however, that there were British people who were not satisfied with official sources, including the Labour Party which might ‘harbour some useful doubts.’⁵³⁴ Chakravarty Rajagopalachari, the leader of the Madras Presidency Congress Party, helped organise the southern leg of the delegation’s tour in the hope that its members would be able to ‘fight the intoxicated [Conservative] majority in the House.’⁵³⁵ The now-banned All-India Congress Committee instructed provincial committees to show the delegation ‘confiscated buildings, looted houses, and other marks of police atrocities.’ Care was to be taken to ‘avoid all exaggerations’ and to ‘bring only thoroughly reliable witnesses before it.’⁵³⁶ One provincial committee believed that ‘it would be effective if Congress activities such as processions, picketing, etc. dispersed by *lathis* could be arranged during their stay and witnessed by them.’⁵³⁷ Papers seized from the Congress socialist Jayaprakash Narayan showed that he was involved in ‘preparing the ground’ for the delegation, a sign of the ‘lively interest displayed by Congress in the delegation’s activities.’⁵³⁸

The Amritsar massacre had ‘hastened the process of Gandhi’s alienation from the British *Raj*.’⁵³⁹ While Gandhi promoted non-violent politics for its intrinsic spiritual value, when international news recorded examples of violent police attacks on his followers the British could be very discomfited. Congress knew this and often contested official explanations of police violence⁵⁴⁰ while ‘literally thousands of accounts of police violence were produced, not

⁵³³ Maurice Hallet ‘Note on the India League Delegation,’ 11.10.1932, NAI/Home/Pol./40/XII/1932.

⁵³⁴ The Congress Bulletin, 13.8.1932, NAI/Home/Pol./40/XII/1932.

⁵³⁵ P.A. Kelly to C.B.S. Clea, 18.7.1932, NAI/Home/Pol./40/XII/1932.

⁵³⁶ DIB/EWR, 25.8.1932, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/448.

⁵³⁷ IPI, ‘Memorandum on the India League Delegation’ n.d., IOR/L/PJ/12/448, DIB/EWR, 8.9.1932, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

⁵³⁸ DIB/EWR, 8.9.1932, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/448.

⁵³⁹ B.R. Nanda, *Gandhi and His Critics* (Oxford and New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 34.

⁵⁴⁰ Vinay Lal, *Committees of inquiry and discourses of “law and order” in twentieth-century British India*. Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Chicago, (1991)

only in newspapers, but in vernacular poetry and proscribed pamphlets.⁵⁴¹ This was a double-edged sword, however: Congress would not have pursued this strategy if it was not guaranteed a violent police response (moral responsibility therefore lies with the colonial state) and the campaign did provide the India League with an accurate impression of colonial police violence. The British government, however, was now able to argue that Congress was responsible for the violence as it had ‘made strenuous endeavours to organise lawless demonstrations and acts of defiance to authority calculated to bring the populace into conflict with the police.’⁵⁴² Based on these arguments, the India Office drew up a memorandum containing ‘reserve ammunition’ to refute India League claims⁵⁴³ and answer questions in Parliament⁵⁴⁴ by putting out ‘suitable material based on the information we have supplied to show the extent to which the members of the delegation from the outset of their tour have allowed themselves to be ‘run and influenced by Congress.’⁵⁴⁵

While in India, a member of the delegation had complained to his audience that ‘If any of us stand up in Parliament to speak on India, some Major or Captain or some such person who has just returned from India snubs us down by asking what we know of India. To this the die-hards will cheer, we have to sit-down quietly....Where is democracy even in England?’⁵⁴⁶ Upon their return, they realised their visit had produced very little change. From the Treasury benches Hoare accused the delegation of ‘not being disposed to credit accurate information when it was supplied to them’ by officials as they preferred to take ‘impressions from Congress workers who are known to have received for the purpose careful instructions from their headquarters as to staging for their benefit Congress demonstrations which would involve clashes with the police.’ A Conservative MP raised the alarm about ‘a series of public

⁵⁴¹ Taylor Sherman, *State Punishment and Violence*, 63.

⁵⁴² I.M. Stephens, ‘Note on the India League Delegation,’ undated, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

⁵⁴³ MacGregor to Stephens, 29.12.1932 BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

⁵⁴⁴ A.H. Ahmed to Bamford, 5.10.1932, NAI/Home/Pol./50/XII/1932.

⁵⁴⁵ I.M. Stephens to H. Macgregor, 24.10.1932, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

⁵⁴⁶ DIB/EWR, 6.8.1932, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/448.

meetings to disseminate this inaccurate information...with the support of the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition and other prominent Members of the Opposition Front Bench.' A Labour MP (who was also an active India League member) asked in response whether 'any information obtained other than through official Government sources is necessarily inaccurate?' Hoare ignored him and harped on how 'the India League received a substantial donation from a prominent Indian Congress leader about the time that the mission was being arranged.' He also appealed to Conservative MPs to explain 'the real state of affairs to the country'⁵⁴⁷ and claimed that 'we have had a large body of evidence taken from Congress sources showing that, from the very start, Congress made its business to stage-manage the kind of picture which they wishes the delegation to see.'⁵⁴⁸ Hoare was citing an intercepted 'letter from Congress headquarters,' which he refused to lay upon the table of the House. Lansbury appealed to the chair to intervene against a violation of parliamentary procedure, but the Speaker ruled against him and the debate was ended. Here, the agnotological empire maps onto a formal weakness of British parliamentary democracy, which was even more pronounced in the sham democracy of British India. In response to questions in the Legislative Assembly of the North-West Frontier Province, an official member said that an inquiry was made (by the accused police officer himself) and no violence took place, even though privately the Frontier government had admitted that the incident 'must be accepted as true.'⁵⁴⁹ The text of the inquiry was confidential and could not be tabled. An Indian Member then asked whether the Pathans 'appeared in Police uniform and that they themselves used *lathis* against their own brethren.' The Honourable Mr. C.H. Gidney felt 'unable to answer his question.' The President of the Legislative assembly then

⁵⁴⁷ HC Deb, 28.11.1932, vol 272, col. 455.

⁵⁴⁸ HC Deb 22.12.1932, vol. 273, col. 1259.

⁵⁴⁹ Government of the North West Frontier Province to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 15.11.1932, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/448.

accused the Indian member of entering into ‘arguments’ which was against ‘procedure, Standing Order and Parliamentary Rule.’⁵⁵⁰

The agnotological empire imposed itself in India in other, more direct ways. Directly after the incident in Mardan, the town had ‘been blockaded and people had been beaten and forbidden to leave their homes. They were told they were not to go see the “Committee” [the delegation]. People had been chased, their hands tied with their turbans, and beaten.’⁵⁵¹ Soon after the India League’s return to Britain, the British branch of the European Association of India wrote to the India Office demanding that something be done ‘to stop dissemination by the India League of scurrilous lies about India.’⁵⁵² They were assured that, while there was nothing to be done ‘to prevent the distribution of such bulletins in this country [Britain]... everything possible is being done to dry up the source of supply.’⁵⁵³ To this end, one S. Venkatapahtaiya, an advocate of Bangalore, was arrested ‘for furthering the activities of the Carnatic Congress Party’ by bringing ‘Leonard Matters, a European, to show him the manner in which the Congress activities were carried out’ while a barrister, Bisheswar Prasad Sinha was arrested for the crime of supplying information to the India League.⁵⁵⁴ IPI concluded that ‘The efforts of the authorities to intercept it [material sent from India to the League] must be proving very successful, to judge by the complaints of both the India League and its ally the Friends of India Society “that it is exceedingly difficult to obtain direct news from India.”⁵⁵⁵ By December the India Office could assure the Government of India that ‘with regard to the India League delegation, the whole affair has gone flop in the British daily press...but meanwhile I am afraid that in some quarters perspective has been lost and we have got into

⁵⁵⁰ Inf., Proceedings of the North West Frontier Province Legislative Assembly, Questions and Answers Session, 9.3.1933, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

⁵⁵¹ IL, COI, 418.

⁵⁵² H.B. Holmes to MacGregor, 15.2.1933 BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

⁵⁵³ IPI to MacGregor, 18.2.1933 BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

⁵⁵⁴ IPI to Peel, 6.1.1933, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/449.

⁵⁵⁵ IPI to Clauson, 18.2.33 BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

touch with certain political organisations to arrange counter propaganda.⁵⁵⁶ IPI's secret report on the India League, based on surveillance and the intercepted letters of former Labour MPs (though care was taken to disguise this) was shared with Conservative Central Office and the Anti-Socialist Union⁵⁵⁷ which overlapped with the British Union of Fascists and had a committee member connected to Joachim von Ribbentrop.⁵⁵⁸

In its campaign, the India Office adopted a clear strategy of agnotological exceptioning, or in their own words, of 'ignoring the general and investigating the particular.'⁵⁵⁹ To take an example, the India Office managed to obtain an advance proof copy of the *Condition of India* from E.W. Davis, the Secretary of the Newspaper association. An official told Davis that 'I can advise, without hesitation, that this is a publication which no responsible Englishman should be associated' and that:

'the Government would deplore the publication of such a book at any time and especially at a time when conditions in India have greatly improved, and English statesmen are employed in the task of securing the constitutional advance of India on the most reasonable line.... Abroad the book must do incalculable harm by suggesting an absolutely false picture of British rule...Its method is the translation to England of the Indian Congress use of exaggeration, misrepresentation and *the suggestion of the exceptional as representing the general* [my emphasis].'⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁶ MacGregor to I.M. Stephens, 1.12.1932, BL/IOR/L/I/1/50.

⁵⁵⁷ 'H.A.R.' to M. Seton and 'Rab' Butler, 29.11.1932, BL/IOR/L/I/1/50.

⁵⁵⁸ Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers on the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933-9* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 225.

⁵⁵⁹ W.D. Croft to Graham Pole, 6.2.1933, BL/IOR/ L/PJ/12/449.

⁵⁶⁰ MacGregor to E.W. Davies (General Secretary of the Newspaper Society), 18.8.1933, BL/IOR/ L/PJ/12/449.

These views were conveyed to the Society member, Mr. J.S. King who represented the publisher Jonathan Cape⁵⁶¹ along with threats of ‘probable libel action’⁵⁶² The India Office was able to report to India with glee ‘our endeavours to keep the book out of the hands of reputable publishers. In this we succeeded, but the control of publishers other than reputable is beyond us.’⁵⁶³ Despite the India Office’s best efforts and the near-bankruptcy of the obscure publisher the League eventually secured, dozens of copies of the *Condition of India* were ordered,⁵⁶⁴ including from the Labour Party Research Department, the No More War group, Foyles, Essex Hall bookshop, the Socialist Bookshop, W.H. Smith, the National Christian Council of India, the ‘Diwan bookshop of Jerusalem and others’⁵⁶⁵ There was real official fear over the book’s considerable sale in India’ and was therefore ‘clearly liable to proscription under Section 99-A of the Criminal Procedure Code.’⁵⁶⁶ The Government of India came close to articulating the rule of colonial difference themselves, noting that there might be objections ‘on grounds of European liberalism [to] the proscription of the India League Delegation’s Report’ but that this was a ‘theoretical rather than a practical objection, under Indian conditions’⁵⁶⁷ and so the book was prohibited under the Sea Customs Act.⁵⁶⁸ Some two hundred copies were dispatched to the United States, however, attracting the attention of the editor of the New-York based magazine, *Asia*, who was interested in Russell (who had written the preface) writing for them. IPI told the British Library of Information in New York that the book was an ‘altogether a poisonous publication’⁵⁶⁹ and requested that important node of British propaganda to prepare the usual ‘counterblasts.’⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶¹ Davies to MacGregor, 19.10.1933, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/449.

⁵⁶² MacGregor to Peel, 18.10.1932 BL/IOR/ L/PJ/12/449.

⁵⁶³ Macgregor to I.M. Stephens, 2.5.1934, BL/IOR/ L/PJ/12/449.

⁵⁶⁴ Jonathan Griffin to Menon, 5.2.1935, NMMML/KMP/241.

⁵⁶⁵ See NMMML/KMP/241.

⁵⁶⁶ Home Department to Secretary of State for India, 25.3.1934, BL/IOR/PJ/12/449.

⁵⁶⁷ Director of Public Information, Home Department, Government of India to Desmond Young, 11.4.1934, BL/IOR/ L/I/1/50.

⁵⁶⁸ IPI copy of Index to Statements of Prohibitions etc. prohibited from entering under Section 19 of the Indian Sea Customs, 10.9.1932. BL/ IOR/L/PJ/12/23.

⁵⁶⁹ MacGregor to Fletcher, 24.8.1934, BL/IOR/L/I/1/50.

⁵⁷⁰ IPI to Johnston, 21.9.1934, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/449.

The Information Officer also wrote to the Foreign Editor of the *Daily Mail*, urging him to ‘recognise that the India League is merely a tool used by the Gandhi Crowd.’⁵⁷¹ The Editor agreed, adding in his chummy reply that the proscription of *The Condition of India* in India was ‘the best thing that could happen to that pestiferous lot.’⁵⁷² The India Office had always been planning for the *Times* and ‘one or two of the more liberal-minded papers’ to receive from the Delhi Intelligence Bureau messages ‘commenting on the visit and impressing the fact that most unfortunately the sources of information tapped by the delegation were very untrustworthy.’⁵⁷³ Their success in delaying the publication of the *Condition of India* changed the strategy, however. They began to prefer it if the press ignored the book completely, but apparently the editor of the *Times* ‘did not wish the opportunity of criticising the tactics of the delegation to slip by.’⁵⁷⁴ The *Times* review argued that it ‘serves to emphasize the diverse views that might be taken of the Indian problem. No doubt a delegation of the India Defence League [the organisation that had organised the Tory revolt against the 1935 Act] could proceed to India and produce a report exactly contrary to this.’⁵⁷⁵

Udhay Mehta writes of India casting ‘a dark epistemological shadow in which access is uncertain and in any case of apocryphal value.’⁵⁷⁶ It is therefore impossible to produce definitive information about the British Empire in India – an impermeable agnotological shield – because any facts could *always* be the exception to the truth. In such a vast country it was easy to, as the *Times* put it ‘secure material that will support a given view; it does not necessarily follow that the view is of the people as a whole.’ The *Times* also preserved the rule of colonial difference and recycled the racist official argument, (producing an echo of the Pathan who must be beaten for being a Pathan) when it reminded its readership that ‘in

⁵⁷¹ MacGregor to Douglas Crawford, 31.3.1934, BL/IOR/L/I/1/50.

⁵⁷² Crawford to MacGregor, 2.4.1934, BL/IOR/L/I/1/50.

⁵⁷³ Inf., Secret Minute Paper, 16.10.1932, BL/IOR/L/I/1/50.

⁵⁷⁴ A.H. Joyce to I.M. Stephens, 12.3.1934, BL/IOR/L/I/1/50.

⁵⁷⁵ *The Times*, 10.3.1934.

⁵⁷⁶ Udhay Mehta, ‘Liberal Strategies of Exclusion,’ *Tensions of Empire*, 73.

dealing with police methods some cognizance must be taken of the psychology of Oriental peoples.’ Thus, the *Times* managed to both justify and deny the existence of excessive colonial violence, an agnotological contortion as astonishing as the Pathan who beats himself. None of this, however, amounted to evidence that the Government was ‘coercing nationalism’ because this was being legitimately expressed at the Round Table Conferences in London where the real obstacle was Gandhi’s refusal to recognise the ‘realities inherent in the constitutionalist controversy.’⁵⁷⁷

The *Manchester Guardian* admitted that ‘things have been done under the Ordinances which Britain might well wish to forget and of them this catalogue is a formidable indictment.’ Moreover, ‘many of the cases of oppression and police terrorism can be amply checked from other sources.’ Despite the value of its ‘amassing of evidence’ the problem was the *Condition of India* had some ‘frequently prejudiced generalisations’⁵⁷⁸ In this further echoing of the official argument being presented as journalistic comment, we find the most illogical exceptioning: that the verifiable evidence catalogued by the delegation was still somehow the exception to the civilised nature of the British Empire. The India Office duly noted that ‘The English press had not fully lost its perspective and patriotism and the English public has not lost its sanity.’⁵⁷⁹ It might have succeeded in controlling the press narrative and damaging the publication prospects of the *Condition of India* but they were not all powerful. The delegation received considerable coverage in India⁵⁸⁰ and the delegation authored a few articles in the British left-wing press.⁵⁸¹ The real triumph came at the Labour Party Conference of 1933. In a Conference that was much exercised by the horrors of dictatorship and fascism Monica Whately stated that ‘In India to-day, under the British flag, there is a form of dictatorship that

⁵⁷⁷ *The Times*, 10.3.1934.

⁵⁷⁸ *The Manchester Guardian*, 17.4.1934.

⁵⁷⁹ MacGregor to Stephens, 18.2.1933, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

⁵⁸⁰ Extracts from the Indian Press are in BL/IOR/L/1/1/50

⁵⁸¹ *New Clarion* 14.1.1933 and *Tribune*, 28.12.1932.

is comparable to the dictatorship of Hitler at the present time.’ She compared Indian prisons to German concentration camps and argued that ‘the Labour Party, as a great working-class movement, had great work to do with regards to Italy and Germany, but more directly for India, because it came under our own Government.’ The Conference passed a composite resolution moved by Sorensen that pledged the party to a ‘policy of self-determination and self-government for India.’⁵⁸²

The India League in Parliament:

Anticolonial Knowledge as Insurgent Accountability 1930-1947

Hannah Arendt identified one of the strengths of European nations practicing ‘overseas imperialism’ to be ‘the geographic distance to separate the illegality of their rule on foreign countries from the legality of their home countries’ institutions.’⁵⁸³ By the interwar period the separation was increasingly attenuated by the political work of the India Office, particularly IPI, in collaboration with Scotland Yard, regional constabularies, MI5, major Ministries, the Conservatives and the far-right. Just as imperialism in India changed the state in Britain, the India League achieved an insurgent and provisional normalization of the imperial constitutional relationship. This was not through the creation of liberal institutions in India, but by providing a degree of accountability for India in an Imperial Parliament. This was valorised for its responsibility for the welfare of its colonial subjects without ever representing them. The India League corrected this by serving as a research bureau for parliamentary questions on India, one that made use of its transnational network to rediffuse anticolonial knowledge from Congress into Parliament via sympathetic Labour MPs. If colonial knowledge-making was a feature of the power of colonial state, therefore,

⁵⁸² LP/RAC, 1933.

⁵⁸³ Hannah Arendt, *On the Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin, 2017 ed.), 243.

anticolonial knowledge-making curbed its power by penetrating its liberal superintendent in Westminster. This moved towards the elimination of Arendt's notion of imperial distance and its differentiated legalities. Hot on its heels, however, was IPI, spying on the India League, anticipating questions and supplying answers via the Conservatives: the agnotological empire, once more, coming home.

The great transformation brought by the 1857 revolution was that Parliament and not a private company was now responsible for governing India, yet given the strength of agnotological imperialism, the meaninglessness of this concession was apparent to twentieth-century critics. At a joint India League and Indian Workers Association meeting in 1943, Brockway noted that 'there is censorship on communications from India to this country so that the people in Britain who are supposed to have authority to decide what shall be done in India, and members of Parliament who are in a position of special responsibility, have no knowledge of what is happening in India at this moment.'⁵⁸⁴ Edward Thompson recalled at another meeting that 'when a Member of Parliament complained in the House that it was impossible to form a judgement on the Indian problem without knowing the full facts, he was rebuffed by His Majesty's Secretary of State for India. Mr Amery snapped back at the Member, saying that it was not intended he should know.'⁵⁸⁵

Given such challenges, Indian anticolonialists had long seen the value of entering the House of Commons. The desirability of appealing to Parliament over the heads of the East India Company Directors was apparent to Rammohun Roy, who was politically active in Britain in the 1830s. Indian representation had been supported by Joseph Hume, a radical MP and the utilitarian philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, who had proposed Roy as a candidate in order to

⁵⁸⁴ Birmingham City Police, Criminal Investigation Department X Office to IPI (relayed to Silver), 24.2.43, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁵⁸⁵ Birmingham City Police, Criminal Investigative Department X Office, Report, 15.1.1944, IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

‘subdue the prejudices of colour’⁵⁸⁶ that he saw in the House. Roy never obtained a seat and of course the first and most notable Indian member of the Commons was Naoroji. Naoroji had to overcome the sensibility that Indians could not represent Britons, or that one race could represent another. His candidature was opposed by the Marquess of Salisbury, the Tory titan and oftentimes Prime Minister, who declared his doubt that ‘we have yet got to that point where a British constituency will elect a black man to represent them. Of course you will understand that I am speaking roughly...because I imagine the colour is not exactly black; but all events he was a man of another race who was very unlikely to represent an English community.’⁵⁸⁷ The electors of Finsbury thought otherwise and so the Tories ran an anti-Naoroji against the new Liberal MP, in the form of Sir Mancherjee Bowringee KCIE, also known as Sir Mancherjee Bow-and-agree.

In addition to Indian MPs like Naoroji or the Communist Shapurji Saklatvala, there were unofficial British ‘Members for India.’ This included Charles Bradlaugh, William Wedderburn, John Bright and Henry Fawcett, all of whom had taken an interest in India and earned the epithet of ‘Member for India,’ the lattermost in collaboration with Naoroji himself.⁵⁸⁸ Some MPs could take the question of India very seriously: anticolonialism in the imperial parliament had a noticeable tendency to press the limits of parliamentary propriety in search of its goals. This was, perhaps, a recognition of the failure of parliamentary representation, timetabling, procedure or power to provide an accountability or a forum commensurate to imperial matters, once again making liberal imperialism abroad a function of liberal weakness at home. In 1930, for example, Brockway was ‘named’ or suspended by a vote of the House after a passionate appeal that in light of the fact that ‘over 5,000 men and women are now in prison in India, and that the last hopes of a settlement seem to be

⁵⁸⁶ Dinyar Patel, *Naoroji*, 91.

⁵⁸⁷ Cited in Dinyar Patel, *Naoroji*, 121

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 89

destroyed, can this House have no opportunity of discussing the matter before we adjourn?’⁵⁸⁹ Brockway defied the Speaker’s instructions to be seated, because ‘the situation between this country and India has reached a crisis’ and so the Prime Minister himself moved the motion that ‘Mr. Brockway be suspended from the service of the House.’ Another MP associated with the ILP and the India League, John Beckett,⁵⁹⁰ then cried ‘Mr Speaker it is a damned disgrace’⁵⁹¹ and took the extraordinary step of trying to remove the Mace from the Chamber, perhaps the most dramatic interference with that totemic object since Oliver Cromwell.

It was Brockway who helped establish the India League as a research bureau for parliamentary questions, asking Menon to provide him with ‘up to date information about India’⁵⁹² and to keep him ‘informed on matters which you think ought to be raised either by question in the House, wiring to the press or approaching Wedgwood Benn.’⁵⁹³ The India League’s parliamentary researches and relationship with Labour MPs would prove far more durable and effective than Indian individual MPs such as Naoroji or Saklatvala, or British ‘Members for India.’ This was because it was not tied to the fortunes of a particular career and could spread its political objectives among multiple member’s parliamentary time, while drawing on the India League’s ‘secret channels’⁵⁹⁴ to the subcontinent. Moreover, its members were white and could both overcome the overt racism that had confronted Naoroji and evade the assertion that they represented special or sectional Indian interests.

The India League’s parliamentary committee was formally established in 1929 and was ‘reconstituted with each new House of Commons.’⁵⁹⁵ The size of its membership largely

⁵⁸⁹ HC Deb, 17.7.1930, vol 241, col. 1462-9

⁵⁹⁰ ENSYR, 23.7.1930, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/356.

⁵⁹¹ HC Deb, 17.7.1930, Vol 241, Col. 1464.

⁵⁹² Brockway to Menon, 1.7.1932, NMML/KMP/415.

⁵⁹³ Brockway to Menon, 2.6.1931, NMML/KMP/415.

⁵⁹⁴ ENSYR, 23.12.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁵⁹⁵ Reginald Sorensen, ‘The India League: A Note By Reginald Sorensen’ 6.9.1945, NMML/KMP/191.

waxed and waned with the fortunes of the Labour Party. After the party's 1931 rout 'most of the members of the parliamentary committee had been defeated at the election and the parliamentary committee had therefore to be completely reconstituted.'⁵⁹⁶ In 1941 its membership took another hit⁵⁹⁷ as Labour entered the wartime coalition and enforced a tighter party discipline but it ended the war at a healthy thirty-nine before expanding spectacularly by one hundred members after the 1945 election.⁵⁹⁸ The committee was really more of an informal grouping. While it often met in the Palace of Westminster, it lacked the formal recognition and cohesion of an official committee. It is also difficult to establish the degree of commitment, particularly parliamentary time, that its members offered the League. Some, like S.O. Davies, Jagger, Sloan and Sorensen worked very hard for the India League in the House of Commons, though the same was not always true of other members. Before 1945 the committee was never large enough to be a major lobby for India (in any case, its Labour members were stuck on the wrong side of the House). Its major contribution was, therefore, the asking of parliamentary questions and participating in debates. Questions addressed the usual themes of police violence, prison conditions and, in particular, the conditions that Nehru was held under.⁵⁹⁹ They also interrogated major political developments: after Wavell refused to permit Gandhi to visit Congress leaders in prison, or even to meet with him, Menon began preparing parliamentary questions for Sorensen and Sloan to use on this subject.⁶⁰⁰ The Executive Committee of the India League would also receive statements from Congress, such as one signed by 29 leaders which indicated that 'a second famine is threatening'⁶⁰¹ and so 'the menace of famine' was then raised in the House of Commons by Sorensen and Graham White.⁶⁰² The most consistent and dedicated India League question-

⁵⁹⁶ IL/EC, 12.11.1931, NMML/KMP/164.

⁵⁹⁷ IL/EC, 8.5.1941, NMML/KMP/176.

⁵⁹⁸ Reginald Sorensen, 'The India League: A Note by Reginald Sorensen' 6.9.1945, NMML/KMP/191

⁵⁹⁹ IL/EC 5.1941 and 29.5.1942 NMML/KMP/176

⁶⁰⁰ IL/EC 5.7.1944, NMML/KMP/176

⁶⁰¹ IL/EC, 5.7.1944, NMML/KMP/176.

⁶⁰² R. Cowan to Menon, 5.5.1930, NMML/KMP/197.

asker was Sorensen. His themes were vast and varied, ranging from the introduction of a state lottery in India,⁶⁰³ the imprisonment of Sarojini Naidu,⁶⁰⁴ the release of political prisoners,⁶⁰⁵ women labouring in coal mines,⁶⁰⁶ (which was justified by the rule of colonial difference: Amery's defence was that 'the conditions in India are quite special'⁶⁰⁷) to bitter debates around famine. On one occasion, while Amery held that the food situation was the result of 'abnormal difficulties arising out of the war' Sorensen asserted that 'famine has been the normal background of India for a long time.'⁶⁰⁸

Menon would later claim that the India League sponsored 95% of the parliamentary questions asked on India.⁶⁰⁹ Although this grand claim is impossible to verify, a case study of some questions drafted for Reginald Sorensen and John Jagger show that parliamentary questions in *Hansard* match are identical to those in a file in the Menon papers in Delhi. Thanks to Jagger, Sorensen and many others, *Hansard* records officials answering questions about the suicide of political prisoners in 'concentration camps,'⁶¹⁰ about Subhas Chandra Bose having his passport seized and tailed in Austria,⁶¹¹ the banning of the Communist manifesto in India⁶¹² and the fact that someone had been arrested for possessing a portrait of Bhagat Singh.⁶¹³ This was not lost on Indians struggling against the *Raj*. A notable example begins with a letter from Sudhindra Pramanik, the Secretary of the strike committee of Digboi, Assam. He declared that the strike by the Assam oil and petrol workers in Digboi and Tinsukia was 'unprecedented...in the history of the Trades Union struggle' and blamed the

⁶⁰³ HC Deb, 20.1.1933, vol. 396 col. 350.

⁶⁰⁴ HC Deb, 24.2.1944, vol. 397 col. 945.

⁶⁰⁵ HC Deb, 8.3.1945, vol. 408 col. 2225.

⁶⁰⁶ HC Deb, 20.1.1944, vol. 396 col. 348.

⁶⁰⁷ HC Deb, 20.1.1933, vol. 396 col. 352.

⁶⁰⁸ HC Deb, 20.1.1944, vol. 396, col 349.

⁶⁰⁹ ENSYR, 23.12.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁶¹⁰ NMML/KMP/185 and HC Deb, 8.2.1937, vol 320. col. 4.

⁶¹¹ NMML/KMP/185 and HC Deb, 30.4.1936, vol 322 col. 1112-3.

⁶¹² NMML/KMP/185 and HC Deb, 22.6.1936, vol. 313 col. 1398-99.

⁶¹³ This came as a written answer: Rab Butler to Sorensen, 1.9.1936, NMML/KMP/185.

Assam Oil Company's 'adamant attitude' which had the support of a united front of 'all the British tea planters of Assam and Bengal' who collectively employed 'more than 12 lacs [sic] slave labour in tea gardens' and who 'combined to raise a false picture bogey of communism, to give the strike a false colour as a fight between the white and black Indians in order to create a very bad form of racial prejudice against the strikers.' Pramanik addressed the 'letter to you and appeal through you to all members of the India League and friends of the Indian struggle and of the Indian working class to give proper publicity regarding the strike in the British and international press.'⁶¹⁴ This petition indicates the hope vested in the India League by organised Indian labour. This faith was misplaced, not because of the India League's disinterest, but because of the inadequacy of parliamentary questions in obtaining change or even accountability for the British Empire. The League duly converted the Secretary's letter into a parliamentary question for Jagger to ask about the strikers being killed by the state.⁶¹⁵ All the League got was a dour response that conceded 'a shooting incident in which three persons were killed' by the police but such 'actions are within the responsibility for law and order of the Provincial Government'⁶¹⁶ which, after the 1935 Act, would have made it the fault of Indian Ministers. This was a lie to the House: Congress had recommended a Conciliation Board and it was the Viceroy who had sent in the Assam Rifles.⁶¹⁷ A written response to Jagger stated, however, that it was the *strikers* and not the state who were guilty of violence.⁶¹⁸ As Jagger passed it to Menon, he noted that 'it gives, as usual, little or no satisfaction.'⁶¹⁹ The agnotological empire was not be easily beaten: the strike was broken and its leaders, including Paramanik, were externed from Assam.

⁶¹⁴ Sudhindra Pramanik, (General Secretary of the Strike Committee, Digboi) to the Secretary of the India League, 25.5.1939m NMML/KMP/142.

⁶¹⁵ See KMP/NMML/185 and HC Deb, 12.6.1939, vol 348, col. 870.

⁶¹⁶ HC Deb 12.6.1939 col 348 col. 870.

⁶¹⁷ Ditee Moni Baruah, 'Assam Oil Company and the Labour Strike in Digboi, 1939' *Vidyasagar University Journal of History*, 8 (2019-2020), 156-168.

⁶¹⁸ R.A. Butler to John Jagger, 1.9.1939, NMML/KMP/185.

⁶¹⁹ Jagger to Menon, n.d., NMML/KMP/185.

Menon's motivation for this dense campaign of question-asking was simply that the answers be 'printed in *Hansard*.'⁶²⁰ While his intention was most likely to use those answers to substantiate arguments made at public meetings, the anticolonial efforts of the parliamentary India League had the deeper achievement of inscribing anticolonial knowledge on the central archive of British democracy, *Hansard*. To take one example, between 1936 and 1939 'British colonial forces brutally quashed the Waziri and Mahsud tribesmen of Waziristan.'⁶²¹ The India League promptly organised a parliamentary question by Sorensen, to which the government admitted in the House of Commons that the British army had marched into Khaisora Valley of the North-West Frontier, despite it being outside the province, in order to 'stiffen the pro-Government party' and 'counter the influence' of a local Faqir. This led to the use of machine gun and artillery fire, an economic blockade and 'the co-operation of the Royal Air Force' where 'on more than one occasion parties of the enemy, having been forced into the open by artillery fire, aircraft dived and bombed parties repeatedly.' The defeated tribals were forced to surrender hostages, forfeit allowances and pay a 'fine of rifles.'⁶²² The now well-established theme of exemplary violence organised along the axis of colonial difference was taken up by another India League member, Emmanuel Shinwell. He asked 'Is it not possible to deal with mobs without resorting to machine-gunning? Is that not something which is not in conformity *with our practice*?' [my emphasis] and Sorensen then drove home the un-Britishness of colonial state violence in India by asking 'can we take it that this will not be a precedent for similar action in this country?'⁶²³

The India League's group of Labour MPs was noticed by those in power, with whom they had highly contentious and emotional clashes. Amery noted that for the 1942 India debate in

⁶²⁰ Menon to Sorensen, 13.3.1937, KMP/NMML/185

⁶²¹ Michael Ortiz, *Anti-colonialism*, 85.

⁶²² See KMP/NMML/185 and HC Deb, 30.11.1936, vol. 318 col 811-5.

⁶²³ HC Deb, 8.10.1942, vol 383 col 1341-2,

the House of Commons, the India League had been ‘priming’ Labour MPs ‘with certain telegrams of Nehru’s.’⁶²⁴ A clash was inevitable: Amery held that political initiative in Britain ‘has never been the voter, selecting a delegate to express his views’⁶²⁵ because a British government is independent and responsible for ‘leading and directing Parliament and the nation in accordance with its own judgement and convictions.’⁶²⁶ As Edward Thompson noted, this attitude was particularly fierce with regard to empire, setting up a conflict between Conservative paternalism and the India League’s attempts to democratise the British Empire in India. In 1944 Amery used a parliamentary sleight of hand to expand authoritarian rule in India by rushing through a bill extending Governor’s rule in the Provinces of British India at a tightly scheduled and late-night sitting, justified by the pretence that the bill’s measures were uncontroversial. He did not get away with it: India Leaguers William Cove, Sloan, Sorensen and White, as well as Frederick Pethick-Lawrence (who was connected with the India League through his wife⁶²⁷ and would speak on League platforms after the war⁶²⁸) savaged Amery for this lack of accountability. The parliamentary debate is revealing of the high emotions of imperialism and anticolonialism as much as it is about the limits of accountability afforded by the ‘imperial’ parliament. Amery’s parliamentary language was provocative, holding that Congress’s resignation from the provincial ministries represented a ‘clear assertion of the totalitarian principle against democracy in the field of provincial government’ and asserting that the Quit India Movement ‘endangered the whole fate of India in the presence of imminent Japanese invasion.’ At this point Cove raised a point of order accusing Amery MP of making ‘contentious statements ‘ which ‘at this time of day’ was ‘curtailing the opportunities to discuss’ issues around the Indian constitution ‘as they should be discussed’ and that the late-night debate was ‘derogatory both to the issues at stake and to

⁶²⁴ Especially Gordon MacDonald MP, see NMML/KMP/185 and Amery to Linlithgow, 29.4.1942, TP 1, 867.

⁶²⁵ Leopold Amery, *Thoughts on the Constitution*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), 15

⁶²⁶ Leopold Amery, *Thoughts*, 31.

⁶²⁷ Menon to Govind Malaviya, 25.6.1932, KMP/NMML/567.

⁶²⁸ ENSYR, 26.2.1945, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

the power and influence of this House.’⁶²⁹ The strongest remarks came from Pethick-Lawrence, however, who accused the Government and Amery of handing ‘this matter in about the worst possible way I can imagine’ by arranging for a ‘Debate at the tail-end of the day’ that forced a number of Members to curtail their speeches’ while ‘the right hon. Gentleman gets up and makes on the most provocative speeches on the Indian situation to which I have ever had the misfortune to listen.’⁶³⁰ Roused, Pethick-Lawrence accused Amery of being ‘totally unfit for the office for which he holds in the Government’ because ‘he does not realise that his remarks are controversial and are likely to arouse fierce feelings in India’ and that ‘he does not understand the psychological reactions which lie behind the tragedy which is going on at the present time.’ By dragging ‘this matter much below the level of world importance, to which the India problem really belongs’ Amery brought a ‘kind of frail mind...to this grave and very important issue.’ White, supporting Pethick-Lawrence, held India to be a ‘matter on which many of us feel very deeply.’ A Conservative MP, Sir Godfrey Nicholson, announced in turn that he felt ‘extraordinarily angry at the violent words used’ by Pethick-Lawrence and that his ‘violent and bitter personal attack’ producing a such ‘an extraordinarily bad temper about it that I shall not say more.’

The emotions in the House of Commons produced by the collision of ideological imperialism and anticolonialism is fascinating for the ways it reveals the emotional interweaving of British politics and imperialism in India. It is revealing of the ways in which authoritarian rule in the colony and the imperfect liberalism of Britain are sutured: Pethick-Lawrence’s fury and despair is *both* a form of affective solidarity with India and a reaction to the way in which Amery had disrespected the House of Commons. Sorensen made the affective equivalence explicit when he rose next, stating that ‘If we go still further’ in the

⁶²⁹ HC Deb, 18.4.1944, vol. 399 col. 155-66.

⁶³⁰ HC Deb, 18.4.1933, vol. 399 col. 159.

debate ‘the temperature will become considerably hotter than in the country about which we are talking.’ He went ahead anyway, and the debate turned over what represented fact or argument about India: against Nicholson’s claims that Amery was making a ‘plain statement of the actions of Congress’ and ‘if that is an attack on Congress, Congress is responsible for that,’ Sorensen accused Amery of being ‘flagrantly contentious’ in referring to the ‘totalitarianism of the Indian Congress.’ Invoking the ‘flogging of nearly 1,000 Indians and the wounding of between 3,000 and 4,000 by the police and ‘those detained in prisons and interment camps in India’ Sorensen accused Amery’s ‘proclamations’ of being a ‘tragic confession of failure’ because ‘for the third time five provinces of British India, including the most important Provinces of Madras and Bombay, are to accept what is virtually a despotic government...when we are still waging a prolonged and terrible war for the reverse principles.’⁶³¹ Again, however, the India League was defeated. Authoritarian Governor’s rule over millions of Indians was duly extended by handful of MPs, in a parliamentary session deliberately engineered to limit dissent and accountability. Nevertheless, while Richard Whiting⁶³² and John Darwin⁶³³ are keen to establish the coolness and the liberal consensus that existed around decolonisation in British politics, the history of empire and its end is also the history of high emotions and angry confrontation between imperialists and anticolonialists, including in the House of Commons.

The India League could resist dominant official narratives by transmitting anticolonial knowledge from India and use it to create accountability and controversy when the those enjoying power would have preferred impunity and silence. Although the League felt that it achieved relatively little with these questions, the reality was that by representing the colony

⁶³¹ HC Deb, 18.4.1944, vol. 399 col. 155-66.

⁶³² Richard Whiting, ‘The Empire in British Politics,’ *Britain’s Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century* ed. Andrew Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 71

⁶³³ John Darwin, *The End of Empire: the historical Debate* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991)

in the imperial parliament the India League was curbing the absolutist instincts of the *Raj*.

When contemplating a complete ban on the Congress Party, the Viceroy felt that:

the main difficulty...is working with a democratic system such as ours...so long as we are dealing with matters here under the ultimate control of Parliament, and so long as, whatever the merits or demerits of the Indian case, a tiny group of left wingers such as Sorensen & Co can without any fear of interruption ask question in Parliament wholly misleading to those of us who know the facts but plausibly convincing to the audience at home, and so long again as Parliament admits of being swept of its feet....it is as I see it extremely hard to feel real confidence that we shall be left free to see through a policy⁶³⁴

Congress's principal organs would be proscribed nonetheless, but not the party itself.

Linlithgow's more extreme plan to deport *both* Gandhi and Nehru from India to a secret location was shelved because of the prospect of parliamentary questions asked by 'Sorensen and his friends.'⁶³⁵ Thus, the India League's project of anticolonial knowledge-making and its projection into the imperial parliament served to establish, to borrow Stephen Howe's phrase, an important degree of 'accountability by proxy'⁶³⁶ for India. This was a normalising modernity that worked by improvising liberal democratic accountability for India within the authoritarian British Empire.

The Agnotological Empire Strikes Back:

The India-Burma Association 1942-1945

⁶³⁴ Linlithgow to Sir Henry Twynam, 18.6.1942, TP 2, 148.

⁶³⁵ Linlithgow to Amery. 15.6.1942, TP 2, 148.

⁶³⁶ Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism*, 327.

To counter the India League, IPI began collecting and forwarding literature produced by the India League to the India Office to help them prepare a defence in Parliament against the ‘arguments which may be put forward by Sorensen and Co.’⁶³⁷ To take one example, in 1944 IPI was collecting information from ‘a very delicate source’ that required ‘careful handling’ (probably a spy deep in the League) in order to prepare answers to questions being drafted by the India League for Lord Farringdon to ask in the House of Lords debate on the Bengal famine.⁶³⁸ IPI even wrote to Ministers advising them that the only means to achieve counter-propaganda was by increasingly active cooperation with Conservative MPs (it was agreed that the Conservative Association would be briefed) and other ‘political elements.’ IPI was also hoping that the Secretary of State for India might ‘drop a hint’ to the only senior Labour figure who might be receptive, Ernest Bevin, about his MPs in the hope that Labour would remove the India League’s ‘parliamentary backing.’⁶³⁹ IPI’s need to anticipate and counter the India League’s questions is evidence that the language of imperialism was being questioned and placed in an uncomfortable dialectic by anticolonial knowledge-making, even in Parliament. In 1933 the India Office noted that

the repercussions of this egregious publication [the *Condition of India*] have, so far, been few, in that it is not according to the spirit of the times, but the wheel of events might turn to circumstances more favourable and it is from the point of view of the future rather than the present that I am inclined to regard the publication with some concern.⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁷ ENSYR, 27.3.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455

⁶³⁸ ENSYR, 20.7.1944, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/453

⁶³⁹ IPI to Sir David Monteath and Lord Munster (n.d., likely 2.1943), BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455

⁶⁴⁰ MacGregor to I.M. Stephens, 2.5.1934, BL/IOR/L/1/I/50.

Menon's biographer noted his bitterness at the ease with which the book's findings had been denied by the authority of the Viceroy and Secretary of State in Parliament in 1933.⁶⁴¹ As late as 1938, Sir Arthur Willert, the director of the Foreign Office News Department, noted that Britain was wanting in terms of national propaganda, due to the complacency that Britain was 'top-dog to such an extent that we did not have to do any propaganda at all.'⁶⁴² By 1942, however, the India Office was having press messages that reported left-wing and even liberal opinion, especially from the India League and the *Manchester Guardian* 'submitted for censorship' before it left Britain for India.⁶⁴³ The spirit of the times was apparently changing. The gnawing problem was that the India Office could not simply refute India League propaganda because that would give it more publicity, but it was becoming increasingly apparent that they could no longer ignore the organisation. They needed to adopt a different strategy, which took the form of the India Burma Association (IBA). This was funded by British business interests in India but received payments from the India Office to attend India League meetings and report on them.⁶⁴⁴ The IBA, in turn, was kept informed by IPI when and where India League events were to be held.⁶⁴⁵ The alliance was possible because the 'British commercial community in India...had much in common between their own needs and those of official propaganda.'⁶⁴⁶ The President of the IBA was Sir Hubert Carr KCIE, formerly head of the Tea and Coffee Department of the Ministry of Food, while its Executive Committee was drawn from British business interests in India including Burmah Oil, the Shell Film Unit and Binney Brothers of Madras.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴¹ T.J.S. George, *Krishna Menon*, 85.

⁶⁴² cited in David A. Lincove, 'The British Library of Information in New York: A Tool of British Foreign Policy 1919-1942', *Information & Culture* 46: 2 (2011), 156-184, 158.

⁶⁴³ Amery to Linlithgow, 1.9.1942, TP 2, 856.

⁶⁴⁴ E. White to A.H. Joyce, 9.10.1942, BL/IOR/L/I/1/722.

⁶⁴⁵ Macgregor to Haward, 8.1.1933, BL/IOR/L/I/1/722.

⁶⁴⁶ G.J. Morley to David Monteath and W.D. Croft, 16.4.43, BL/IOR/L/I/1/722.

⁶⁴⁷ Olaf Caroe to A.H. Joyce, (n.d., likely 4.1945), BL/IOR/L/I/1/722.

The IBA attempted to form its own imperialist network, including the East India Association, India Civil Service Association, Indian Police Association, Victoria League, Royal Empire Society and others. The IBA was not the first organisation to ‘go after’ an anticolonial group in Britain: the League Against Imperialism had been attacked in the press by the Economic League, later the British Empire Union.⁶⁴⁸ The had been founded by Admiral Reginald Hall, who has been linked to the Zinoviev telegram and the circulation of the ‘Casement Diaries’ that sealed the fate of that great Irish anticolonial campaigner and revolutionary. In 1928 the BEU had the Countess of Willingdon (the Viceroy’s wife) as its President and a brace of hereditary peers as its Vice-Presidents. It called for ‘Britain for the British’⁶⁴⁹ and its campaign included a ‘motor car campaign’ to prevent the ‘return of a socialist government.’⁶⁵⁰ Just as India League supporters like Cripps and Laski found it easy to argue that the liberation of India and the British working class were part of the same struggle, the BEU braided the defence of imperialism with attacks on taxation and justifications of titled, leisured and landed wealth.⁶⁵¹ There was also the India Empire Society, the successor to the India Defence League that Churchill used to marshal opposition to the 1935 Government of India Act. The IES still counted Churchill as a member, along with a roster of aristocrats, diehards, retired colonial officials and military men. The India Office liked to ‘vary’⁶⁵² the IBA with the IES in its campaign to disseminate the ideologies of imperialism in Britain.

The IBA’s work for the India Office was varied: it advised the BBC on speakers on India, likely influencing the BBC’s ‘Roundtable’ program that showcased the political and social differences in India. This so infuriated Menon that he declared that the BBC was nothing but ‘government machinery.’⁶⁵³ The IBA’s speakers were all British as even the India Office

⁶⁴⁸ HHC/RBP/U/DBN/25/3.

⁶⁴⁹ British Empire Union, *British Empire Union* (pamphlet, n.d., likely 1928).

⁶⁵⁰ British Empire Union, *The General Election* (pamphlet, n.d., likely 1928).

⁶⁵¹ British Empire Union, *A Matter of Urgency* (pamphlet, n.d., likely 1928).

⁶⁵² For IBA, see BL/IOR/L/I/1/645, for IES, see BL/IOR/L/I/1/51.

⁶⁵³ IBA, Progress Report for July, BL/IOR/L/I/1/722 and IPI to Silver 12.5.42 BL/IOR/L/J/12/454.

recognised that ‘90% of Indians whether Hindu or Muslim, are Nationalists.’⁶⁵⁴ The parastatal position of the IES and especially the IBA meant that it was in a ‘freer position for carrying on these activities than is the India Office, being free, as they are, to enter the field of controversy, both in the press and on the public platform, to disseminate literature, to build up a panel of speakers, and in particular to reply to attacks from such bodies as the India League.’⁶⁵⁵ The IBA is an example of the contemporary political term of ‘astroturfing:’ the practice of hiding the sponsors of a message or organisation with the intention of making it appear to be a grassroots organisation, but which actually serves the interests of powerful groups: another gambit of the agnotological empire. It also blurs the boundary between imperial, official and British politics. The IBA acknowledged that it was receiving most of its requests from ‘organisations with conservative affiliations’ but was at pains to not be identified as a right-wing body.⁶⁵⁶ Nevertheless, one of the tasks allotted to the IBA and the IES by the India Office was to counter parliamentary questions by MPs associated with the India League by researching supplementary questions to be fed to Conservative MPs that would appear to be distinct from official answers.⁶⁵⁷ The common strategy, it appears, was to ask some version of the question ‘why the most exclusive aristocracy in the world, the Hindu Brahmins, always seek support from Socialists in this country?’⁶⁵⁸ The IBA’s partisan nature is best revealed, however, by its support for Leo Amery’s local parliamentary campaign, helping him resist a joint India League-Indian Workers Association-CPGB campaign against him in his constituency of Sparkbrook.⁶⁵⁹

The India Office’s desperate attempts to restore the narrative of Britain’s Empire appears to be comical inversion (literally: India League meetings were sometimes barracked by the IES,

⁶⁵⁴ Inf. to Haward, 21.11.1932, BL/IOR/L/1/722.

⁶⁵⁵ G.J. Morley to David Monteath and W.D. Croft, 16.4.43, BL/IOR/L/1/1/722

⁶⁵⁶ IBA, Progress Report for July, BL/IOR/L/1/1/722

⁶⁵⁷ MacGregor to Mr. Morley, 4.5.43, BL/IOR/L/1/1/51.

⁶⁵⁸ See, for example: HC Deb, 24.2.1944, vol.397 col.955.

⁶⁵⁹ Amery to R.H. Edwards, 3.7.1942, BL/IOR/L/1/1/890.

though on one occasion their interventions merely provoked ‘a great deal of hilarity.’⁶⁶⁰) to the powerful colonial knowledge-making project in India. Just as colonialism as a form of knowledge forced the ‘objectification’ of colonial society and culture, the anticolonial gaze forced the India Office into a dialogue where it had to provide examples of what empire, as an object, was for. On one occasion in 1943 the only answer they could come up with was an ‘anti-malarial campaign’ going on somewhere in India.⁶⁶¹ Later, however, the India Office provided the IBA with extensive lecture notes which provides an insight into the ideologies of imperialism operating in Britain and how they were increasingly forced into a defensive dialogic position with anticolonial knowledge-making.

The IBA notes conceded India postwar dominion status, but only if it ‘has the undoubted support of the main elements in Indian life,’ code for expressed communal agreement. The emptiness of the promise was shown by the following instructions to the IBA that ‘Mr. Jinnah’s present ascendancy over the Muslims should be recognised and the significance of the Pakistan scheme given its political importance.’ The demand for Pakistan was ‘an expression of Muslim determination never again to have the status of minority, however “weighted” or safeguarded.’ The IBA was warned that questions might be asked about the representativeness of the Muslim League, for example that ‘it is only one of nine Muslim organisations and that the other eight in the majority support Congress?’ The answer was that ‘without the agreement of the League, or a substantial portion of the League, to measure of constitutional change would be practicable.’ The IBA was invited to draw attention to evidence of the Muslim League’s strengths, despite its poor showing in the 1937 election. The notes denigrated Shia and Momin support for Congress and held that ‘if there were a General Election to-morrow, Mr. Jinnah, who is a Shia, would command 95% of the Muslim

⁶⁶⁰ IPI to Silver, 11.7.38, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/293.

⁶⁶¹ Macgregor to Morley, 4.5.42, BL/IOR/L/I/1/51.

votes.’ Given, therefore, that Indian leaders were likely to fail to agree ‘on the lines of a new constitution...the British cement, in some form or other, should be retained.’ Moreover, ‘Attempts by certain elements to sabotage the war effort and threaten negotiations with Japan should be exposed.’ Congress was to be blamed for obstructing constitutional progress and its 1937 election victory was attributed to ‘the educational backwardness of the Indian voter’ who followed ‘simple slogans and emotional or personal appeals.’ Broadly, the IBA should adopt a ‘quiet insistence...on the problems which will confront India in her new condition after the war.’ A section entitled ‘British Achievements in India’ included claims about the rule of law, defence of borders, agricultural improvement, investment and the railways, with the India Office offering the callous lie that ‘famine, once the periodical visitation of rainfall failure, now virtually abolished by railways...and canals’ as well as the risible claim, given the operation of the Revolutionary Movements Ordinance, that ‘freedom of opinion, carrying with it the right of association and a press liberty [was] as little fettered as in most democratic countries.’

The power and texture of anticolonial argument, and the resulting reduction of ideological imperialism to a defensive, dialogic position is inadvertently demonstrated in the question-and-answer section of the notes. This offered 32 ‘points to made in removal of misapprehensions *which have frequent currency*’ [my emphasis]. To predicted accusations of British racism and arrogance towards Indians, the notes held that ‘the British official...has invariably been able to work and live in the country on the best of terms with the people... British people mix on terms of complete equality with Indians of similar social, economic or political status. Although British people hang together and have their own clubs, there is no sense of division between them and the Indians.’ One question anticipated by the India Office was ‘dating the consolidation of British rule in India from 1833 (110) years, how is it that

Indian workers in such large numbers live below the recognised subsistence level?' The answers included 'density of population' and the resulting 'antiquated methods of production' and 'relative lack of industrialisation.' Naturally this was not the fault of the empire, but the ways in which 'religious tabus [sic] and deep-rooted custom (eg. extravagant expenditure on weddings) present obstacles to social and economic advancement.' In any case this was not a problem since 'life in India is simpler than in the West. Food, clothing and housing are cheaper.' To justify this the India Office drew on that category of Indian it knew best: 'it costs only 2d a day to feed in jail a convict with food which keeps him in good health.' Moreover 'India has largely a tropical climate. In a great part of her territory clothes are a luxury rather than a necessity.' Educational failures were blamed on devolution to Indian ministers, language barriers and obstacles to women working, as well as caste objections to mixed schools. Poor health was primarily the fault of 'climate, poverty and under-nourishment, early marriage, primitive midwifery, pressure of custom on recruitment...and the people's reluctance to enter hospitals for treatment.' While Missionaries had rendered 'splendid service' poor health was the responsibility of 'Indian ministers [who] have had charge of public health since 1921.' The *Sarda* act was heralded as a triumph, (despite it being reluctantly conceded by the British after a considerable mobilisation by Indian women). To the question 'Is British policy in India to divide and rule and thus encourage Hindu-Muslim difference?' the IBA was instructed to answer that 'the whole case is trumped up' because 'cultural differences are great' as there 'is practically no inter-marriage and no intercommunal social life.'⁶⁶²

In 1942 *alone* the IBA circulated such arguments to '197 meetings' including Rotary Clubs, Educational Institutions, 44 units of the armed forces and 27 women's institutes. 'In many of the areas thus covered the India-Burma Association has followed in the tracks of extremists [a

⁶⁶² Lecture Notes (India), in Hugh MacGregor to the IBA, BL/IOR/L/1/1/722.

favourite term for the India League] and so helped to counter their mischief.’⁶⁶³ Far from confidently proclaiming the achievements of empire in terms of moral and material progress, the IBA was anticipating anticolonial questions and conceptions that *it* acknowledged to be commonplace. Its answers took cover under colonial difference: the essentialised and unchangeable characteristics of Indians. This vacated the central claims of liberal imperialism, namely its ability to improve, revealing the project’s further collapse into contradiction. The lecture notes might be usefully used as a beginner’s guide to how orientalism works by revealing it at its most crudely self-evident: the production of knowledge about the East in order to justify a project of colonial domination. It also problematizes Orientalism in its more Foucauldian mode: For all the vast system of censorship that kept India and Britain apart and protected that single orientalist voice, it had fallen from one of authority to just one among many: jostling for space among other insurgent voices, including that of the India League, as a weapon of the weak in the fight against anticolonial knowledge-making.

Anticolonialism was a form of insurgent knowledge-production that sought to exemplify imperialism by its crimes, achieve accountability, and demonstrate the ‘un-British’ nature of British colonial rule. What is historically interesting about this dialogue between anticolonial knowledge-making and colonial agnotology is that it took place in liberal Britain and thus illuminates the operation of secrecy and surveillance in Britain in defence of empire. This demonstrates the ways in which the colonial state of exception could rebound into the metropole in complex ways that depended upon, revealed and constituted limits to British liberalism. This included the limits on the power of individual MPs, the India Office’s entry into British politics through the IBA and IPI’s free reign to intercept the correspondence of

⁶⁶³ IBA, Memorandum on the Points to be Raised by the Deputation of the Executive Committee of the India-Burma Association to the Secretary of State on April 20th, 1943, BL/IOR/L/1/1/722.

Labour Party members, tip the scales of parliamentary debates and collaborate with Conservatives, the far right and an ostensibly independent press. This leaves us with the irony that while the false promise of liberal imperialism was to make India more ‘civilised’ like Britain, when challenged by the India League with the opposite truths of colonialism, the agnotological and security annexes to the colonial state in India that were secretly present in Britain found it easy and expedient to make Britain, in certain small ways, more like the *Raj*.

III

The India League, Indian Political Intelligence and the Indian Diaspora: Reimagining Colonial and Anticolonial Space 1940-1947

The activities of the India League, IPI and IBA blur the boundary between colonial and non-colonial political space within the British Empire. This invites a consideration of the spatial implications of the India League in relation to imperial geographies of rule. There is no better place to examine the ambiguities and opportunities presented by the India League’s location and resulting use of political space than its relationship to the British Indian diaspora. Zaib un-Nisa Aziz notes that diasporic anticolonialism has not been comprehensively treated as a subject of analysis.⁶⁶⁴ Ashwini Vasanthakumar has drawn our attention to the analytical potential of analysing diasporic activism as ‘an extraordinary politics that funds insurgencies, amplifies democratic opposition, challenges social and religious traditions, and incubates nations.’⁶⁶⁵ More directly, Jonathan Schmeer has noted that, as early as 1900 ‘anti-imperial London contained an active, well-organised, well-connected and politically sophisticated Indian contingent.’ Because India played a crucial role in the imperial imaginary, ‘India’s

⁶⁶⁴ Zaib un-Nisa Aziz, ‘Passages from India: Indian anti-colonial activism in exile 1905-20’, *Historical Research*, 90: 248 (2017), 404-421, 406.

⁶⁶⁵ Ashwini Vasanthakumar, *The Ethics of Exile: A Political Theory of Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 1.

children in the capital city had a role to play disproportionate to their numbers.⁶⁶⁶ By the interwar period this role was increasingly visible and effective, in London and other cities in Britain. This has now been the subject of an excellent volume edited by Rehana Ahmed and Sumita Mukherjee⁶⁶⁷ which this chapter is indebted to in its examination of the India League. It argues that British Indian diasporic politics resisted and reconfigured the differentiated and authoritarian constitutional structure of the British Empire by positing forms of liberal political modernity (denied by empire) for themselves, Indians and India. This is examined in two cases: the first is the transatlantic anticolonial voyaging of Bhicoo Batlivala, in which her anticolonial argumentation and modern, gendered and Indian personhood overwrote the imperial ideologies of Katherine Mayo's *Mother India*. This justified imperialism by holding Hindu social practices and political modernity to be entirely incompatible. Batlivala is followed by an examination of the India League's parliamentary campaign, in alliance with the Indian Workers Association and the CPGB, against Leopold Amery in his Birmingham constituency of Sparkbrook. This ranged Indian labourist politics against a Secretary of State for India who was formally accountable to no Indian at all. It advanced an anticolonial parliamentary constituency on behalf of the colony of India and against the racially differentiated and authoritarian structure of the British Empire.

This chapter also show how the empire attempted to recolonise Indians through the diaspora-disciplining and recognisably colonial activities of IPI, that secret arm of the *Raj* operating in Britain. This emphasizes the British Empire as one that, while it certainly stimulated connections and mobilities, was ultimately an empire of difference, that was continuously rebordering itself, even in Britain. I also explore IPI's defeat by India's transformation from a colony into a modern state enjoying the right to nominate its own diplomatic representatives.

⁶⁶⁶ Johnathan Schneer, *Imperial London*, 184.

⁶⁶⁷ *South Asian Resistances in Britain 1858-1946* eds. Sumita Mukherjee and Rehana Ahmed (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

Nehru chose the IPI's biggest target, Menon, to be High Commissioner for India, a move that made IPI's imperial intelligence structure untenable and abolished its ability to project colonial space into Britain.

The League practiced its politics in a liberal, modern, political space, marked by professions of support for freedoms of political organisation, expression and the press which. These, while they were often abridged by the India Office, MI5, Special Branch and IPI in ways that were, at times, recognisably colonial, nevertheless presented opportunities unavailable in the authoritarian colony. Conversely, there was no scope for mass mobilisation in Britain, no ability to change the profit-and-loss account of empire and no capacity to force crises of local political control. Civil disobedience by the Indian diaspora in Britain would have been a farce and a terrorist campaign counterproductive. The impossibility of mass mobilisation avoided certain risks, however. Leftist critiques of imperialism could be advanced without alienating conservative sponsors or running the risk of a genuine social revolution. Equally, as Judith Brown notes 'the roots and rationale of political awareness and activity in modern India... have often been local and particular.'⁶⁶⁸ The India League had no relationship with India's localities and particularities. It could therefore say something about India without being contradicted by an inconvenient fact. Neither did it have to compete with other movements jostling for attention in India: there was no comparable organisation advancing the cause of the Muslim League, Dravidianism, the Princes or Dalits in Britain, allowing the India League a far clearer field than Congress. Thus, one of the ironic strengths of the India League was the degree to which it was free of India. This meant that diasporic anticolonialism was free to pursue political ways of being Indian that resisted colonial tropes of essentialised Indian characteristics which, as we have seen, were being actively disseminated by the BBC, IBA, Conservatives and others. This was achieved through the construction of a deterritorialised

⁶⁶⁸ Judith M. Brown 'The Role of a National Leader: Gandhi, Congress and Civil Disobedience, 1929-34', *Congress and the Raj*, 133.

pan-Indianness which rejected the reduction of India to communal disharmony. This rejected, as Paul Gilroy puts it, ‘racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses’ that hold these composite identities to be ‘mutually exclusive.’⁶⁶⁹ Drawing on Henri Lefebvre, Manu Goswami notes how territory is not a ‘pregiven container’ but a ‘constitutive dimension of social relations’ which can act as ‘simultaneously the locus, medium and product of social relations and historicity.’⁶⁷⁰ More specifically, ‘anticolonial geographies,’ according to Andrew Davies ‘differ from postcolonial approaches because of their explicitly political nature.’⁶⁷¹ Borrowing from Paul Gilroy, this chapter explore diasporic anticolonialism as the ‘pursuit of an autonomous space in the system of formal political relationships that distinguished occidental modernity.’⁶⁷² This conceptually links the notion of pan-Indianness, political spatiality and constitutional modernity through the entry of the colonial diaspora into the liberal political space of the metropole, which also served to attenuate the racially differentiated constitutional structure of the British Empire. Thus, between the construction of modern Indian womanhood in America and an anticolonial Indian parliamentary constituency in the imperial locality of Birmingham, the India League used British liberalism to organise the diaspora’s political space and identity – both elite and subaltern – against an empire that both claimed to be modernising India while denying it the liberal freedoms, identities and institutions of that self-same modernity.

The Anticolonialism of Modern Indian Womanhood:

The Transatlantic Campaigns of Bhicoo Batlivala 1940-1944

⁶⁶⁹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 1.

⁶⁷⁰ Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 34.

⁶⁷¹ Andrew Davies, *Geographies of Anticolonialism: political networks across and beyond South India, c. 1900-1930* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2020), 12.

⁶⁷² Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 112.

America was not part of the Empire, but it was simultaneously a space in which British security fears played out and part of the India League's network.⁶⁷³ The importance of American public opinion to British imperial interests had been recognised as early as 1919 with the foundation of the British Library of Information (BLI) in New York. This was charged with 'supplying a wide variety of Americans with information about Britain's domestic, imperial and foreign affairs,'⁶⁷⁴ The BLI was subsidised by IPI and therefore, eventually, by the Indian *ryot*.⁶⁷⁵ IPI also kept the BLI informed of Indian activities in the USA⁶⁷⁶ During the war, the India Office informed the IBA that the USA was an urgent field for spreading 'accurate information.'⁶⁷⁷ IPI firmly believed that 'American postwar opinion is a factor which, presumably will have to be considered when framing British policy in regard to India.'⁶⁷⁸ This was the bureaucratic expression of British anxiety over, as Mrinalini Sinha puts it 'the increasingly internationalized arena in which British colonial rule in India and its future were debated after the Great War,' a period that would increasingly be seen as the 'American century.'⁶⁷⁹ Roosevelt had taken an interest in India, and the newspaper empire of William Randolph Hearst was critical of British policy in Ireland and in India:⁶⁸⁰ If Britain was the soft centre of the British Empire, therefore, America was even softer.

America therefore provided a space in which an anticolonial Indian identity could be presented, that of a modern Indian womanhood, by an India League activist, Bhicoo Batlivala. Batlivala's argumentation and selfhood rejected the tropes of womanhood produced by empire in its most scandalous expression, that of Katherine Mayo's *Mother India*, which

⁶⁷³ David Featherstone, *Resistance, Space and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-Global Networks* (Chichester: John Wiley, 2008).

⁶⁷⁴ David A. Lincove, 'The British Library of Information', 157.

⁶⁷⁵ Minute for the Council of India, 13.5.1933, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/81.

⁶⁷⁶ IPI to Silver, 22.5.40. BL/IOR/L/PJ/323.

⁶⁷⁷ IBA, Memorandum on the Points to be Raised by the Deputation of the Executive Committee of the India-Burma Association to the Secretary of State 20.4.1943 and G.J. Morley to David Monteath and W.D. Croft, 16.4.1943, BL/IOR/L/1/1/722.

⁶⁷⁸ IPI to Silver, 12.9.41, BL/IOR/L/PJ/453.

⁶⁷⁹ Mrinalini Sinha, *Spectres of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 3.

⁶⁸⁰ Mrinalini Sinha, *Spectres of Mother India*, 36.

had circulated widely within the USA. Batlivala's activism also conquered political space that was not naturally made available her to by the discourses of Indian nationalism, which offered only a domestic role for Indian woman, as guardians of the national home. She also accessed elite political spaces that were difficult for any women to enter. Accessing America as a political space at all was always a victory. Seema Sohi has surveyed the considerable extent of American and British collaboration in the repression of Indian anticolonial activists during World War I. She argues that American securitisation of Indians as 'dangerous and subversive, and therefore excludable and deportable, consisted of a new kind of racial formation.'⁶⁸¹ Against these racialised exclusions, the India League enjoyed some access to America which could operate along antiracist solidarities: Reginald Babulal Singh, for example, had volunteered at the India League before moving to Connecticut to teach philosophy. Officials described him as 'very active in connection with Negro affairs' while also 'touring the United States in the interests of the Indian National Congress' by sourcing 'propaganda material' from the India League.⁶⁸²

Through Professor George Caitlin and his celebrated novelist, socialist and feminist wife, Vera Brittain, the India League also had contacts with Eleanor Roosevelt, though little seems to have come of this. The League already had a bizarre connection, however, with the American Ambassador in London, John Gilbert Winant, because he had been receiving 'professional treatment from the Indian masseur, Professor Diwan Chand Varma under the direction of Dr. Katial, ex-Mayor of Finsbury' who was 'a member of the Executive Committee of the India League.'⁶⁸³ By 1942 Menon was an established conduit between Nehru and Winant, as well as the Soviet and Chinese ambassadors⁶⁸⁴ and Winant was not

⁶⁸¹ Seema Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance, and Indian Anticolonialism in North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 8.

⁶⁸² H.M. Consul-General, Chicago to Foreign Office, 24.6.40, in TNA/MI5/KV2/2509.

⁶⁸³ IPI to Silver, 29.8.1941, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/453.

⁶⁸⁴ Nehru to Menon, 1.12.1942, SWJN 12, 10.

averse to conveying Menon's views to the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull.⁶⁸⁵ When Winant 'really let himself go' on the subject of Nehru's imprisonment in 1941, the India Office was gravely alarmed,⁶⁸⁶ leading Amery to warn the ambassadors against giving Menon too much credence.⁶⁸⁷ Winant would nevertheless play a crucial role in the American pressure that led to the Cripps Mission. By 1943 the American Embassy was even forwarding India League publications to the Indian section of the Library of Congress. IPI was careful to note the 'pro-Indian National Congress bias of personnel of the Library of Congress' which was somehow related to the fact that the Director of Indic studies, Dr Poleman, was 'a Jew.'⁶⁸⁸ It was deemed desirable that the Director-General of Information of the Government of India take steps towards 'educating the members of staff of the Library of Congress' and to see that 'Government publications are also displayed on the Library shelves.'⁶⁸⁹

After the issuing of the Atlantic Charter, Churchill had repudiated the application of its principles to the non-white colonies of the British Empire but no similar declaration had emerged from the United States. After the Charter was issued, the India League began 'working up every possible contact with Americans' in Britain 'with the object of building up Indian propaganda in the USA round the passage in the Declaration which proclaims the right of every country to determine its own form of Government.'⁶⁹⁰ Equally, Nehru's despair at Labour's immobility early in the war led him to advise Menon to go to America, where more might be achieved.⁶⁹¹ Menon agreed that a visit to the USA could 'correct propaganda and mischief there in relation to India and to impart to sympathisers in America a correct knowledge of the present political situation in India.'⁶⁹² This need became increasingly acute

⁶⁸⁵ William Phillips Diary, cited in Jairam Ramesh, *A Chequered Brilliance*, 233.

⁶⁸⁶ IPI to Silver, 30.8.1941, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/453.

⁶⁸⁷ See TP 2, 429-430.

⁶⁸⁸ IPI to Silver, 26.5.44, BL/IOR/L/PJ/456.

⁶⁸⁹ IPI to Silver, 26.5.44, BL/IOR/L/PJ/456.

⁶⁹⁰ IPI to Silver, 12.9.41, BL/IOR/L/PJ/453.

⁶⁹¹ Nehru to Abdul Kalam Azad, 21.4.1940, SWJN, 2, 212.

⁶⁹² IPI to Silver, 18.4.1940, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

after the failure of the Cripps Mission. Menon 'alleged that Sir Stafford Cripps was sent to India for the express purpose of belittling the Indian national movement in American eyes and accused the Amery's recent broadcast to the USA as a 'tissue of lies.'⁶⁹³ Menon secured the blessings of Nehru and Maulana Azad, then president of Congress, as well as funds from the party for an American tour, but the India Office blocked his passport.⁶⁹⁴

While the British prevented Menon from visiting the USA, this did not entirely close off America because there was more than one India League. In addition to a tiny copycat League in Mauritius⁶⁹⁵ the India League had connections with the younger India League of America (ILA) led by Sirdah Jag Jit Singh, a former member of Congress. The ILA pursued many of the same mobilizational methods as the India League, including publishing a newspaper and pamphlets, pursuing research, holding meetings and sponsoring exhibitions.⁶⁹⁶ Its active members resembled those in the British organisation: Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union, Sidney Hertzberg, a socialist and Louis Fischer, an admirer of Gandhi and disseminator of his ideas.⁶⁹⁷ The Nobel-prize winning novelist Pearl. S Buck served as its chairperson: Buck was closely connected with Nehru and Vijayalakshmi Pandit, as well as taking an interest in the All-India Women's Conference – the ILA would publicise and organise events for Vijayalakshmi Pandit.⁶⁹⁸ Thus, Americans committed to India, as well as Indians themselves, populated the ILA. For this reason, Singh preferred Menon's organisation to others in Britain, because it had 'the support of the largest number of English liberals.'⁶⁹⁹

The American League, despite its shorter life (it was founded in 1941⁷⁰⁰) appears to have

⁶⁹³ ENSYR, 16.9.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/454.

⁶⁹⁴ Handwritten note on a memorandum from IPI to Dibdin and Walton (n.d., likely 9.10.1940) and India Office to Passport Office 3.5.1940 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

⁶⁹⁵ A.H. Cassim to the India League, n.d., KMP/NMML/210.

⁶⁹⁶ J.J. Singh to Menon, 20.3.1946 NMML/KMP/209.

⁶⁹⁷ Robert Shaffer 'J.J. Singh and the India League of America, 1945-1959: Pressing at the Margins of the Cold War Consensus' *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 31: 2, (2012), 68-103, 72.

⁶⁹⁸ Rosalind Parr, *Citizens of Everywhere: Indian Women, Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism 1920-1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 95.

⁶⁹⁹ J.J. Singh to Menon, 29.1.1946, NMML/KMP/209.

⁷⁰⁰ Robert Shaffer 'J.J. Singh and the India League of America,' 68.

enjoyed legislative successes denied to the British one. Sharing a concern for the Bengal famine, the ILA formed an Indian Famine Emergency Committee and an accompanying National Advisory Board which included Walter White of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, Rufus Matthew Jones: a notable Quaker, Gardner Cowles of the Office of War Information, Albert Einstein and two Congressmen, including Representative Karl E. Mundt.⁷⁰¹ Mundt sponsored an amendment, after lobbying by Singh, which included India in the UNRRA Bill, against 'strong British and isolationist opposition.'⁷⁰² This extended the American remit of the United National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration beyond the territories liberated from Nazi occupation to include Bengal, possibly paving the way for the important Hoover food missions. Singh was also involved in passing the 'Indian Immigration and Naturalization Bill'⁷⁰³ and when he left America for India in 1959, it was as someone described as 'a great unofficial Ambassador of India to this country'⁷⁰⁴ praised by figures ranging from Richard Nixon to the socialist Norman Thomas. This was a strong contrast to Menon, hounded by Britain's intelligence services, despite his official position as High Commissioner.⁷⁰⁵

Singh and Menon's organisations were independent, though desiring closer collaboration. Menon feared, however, that their correspondence was being intercepted and if they exchanged views on political affairs 'it probably will not get past the censor'⁷⁰⁶ and so the India Leagues were prevented from pursuing coordinated action. The most significant American intervention, therefore, by the India League came because of Bhicoo Batlivala. Batlivala was born to the Parsi mill-owning Bombay elite – a beneficiary of India's most

⁷⁰¹ ILA Press Release, 11.3.1946, NMML/KMP/209.

⁷⁰² *New York Post*, 21.7.1946.

⁷⁰³ J.J. Singh to Menon, 20.3.1946, NMML/KMP/209.

⁷⁰⁴ Robert Shaffer 'J.J. Singh and the India League of America,'69.

⁷⁰⁵ Paul McGarr, "A Serious Menace to Security:" British Intelligence, V.K. Krishna Menon and the Indian High Commission in London, 1947-52' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 38: 3, 441-469.

⁷⁰⁶ Menon to J.J. Singh 10.2.1944, NMML/KMP/209.

important industrial concentration to be based on domestic capital. Batlivala also had connections with the radical Saklatvala wing of the industrialist Tata family: some irony that both Batlivala and Shapurji Saklatvala were wealthy scions of Indian capital who based their political careers on articulating leftist criticisms of empire in Britain. Batlivala had had a varied and successful career before becoming involved with the India League, having been called to the bar in London and worked for the Commissioner of Education and Inspector of Schools for the princely state of Baroda, the first woman admitted to the State's service.⁷⁰⁷ The India Office informed the BLI that 'she is apparently well-known in London as a charming and vivacious person'⁷⁰⁸ and the American press would gush over her 'social prestige in England' especially the fact that she had been 'presented at the court of St. James' and 'played on the first woman's polo team in England.'⁷⁰⁹

Batlivala introduction to the India League was, as ever, via Spain, accompanying Nehru and Menon during their visit.⁷¹⁰ She later attended the Haripura session of Congress and by 1940 had 'spoken on numerous occasions for the League'⁷¹¹ and became an active member of its Executive Committee. Batlivala was also an internationalist feminist, having raised funds for the Twelfth Congress of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship.⁷¹² Rosalind Parr has noted that 'the independent agency of women' within Indian nationalism 'especially in the international context, is less well understood' by historians⁷¹³ and that there was an almost forgotten process by which 'women associated with the anti-colonial movement had been internationally engaged in global civil society.'

Individuals such as Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalakshmi Pandit and Kamala Chattopadhyaya had

⁷⁰⁷ IPI, Miss Bhicoo Batlivala, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/632.

⁷⁰⁸ A.H. Joyce to Robert Wilberforce, 24.4.1940, BL/IOR/L/PJ/1295.

⁷⁰⁹ Extract from *The Seattle Times*, 1.3.1940, BL/IOR/PJ/12/632.

⁷¹⁰ Michael Ortiz, *Anti-colonialism*, 88.

⁷¹¹ ENSYR, 15.9.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/631.

⁷¹² *Civil & Military Gazette*, 23.4.1935.

⁷¹³ Rosalind Parr, *Citizens of Everywhere*, 3.

forged supportive transnational networks [and] engaged with public opinion.’ In doing so they ‘legitimised the Indian nationalist cause’ with many of them setting ‘their sights on the United States of America.’⁷¹⁴ In 1939 Batlivala delivered a speech in the United States where she used the economic nationalist argument about British impoverishment of India and denounced colonial violence and ‘arrests without warrant, secret trials.’ She also claimed that the movement she represented was ‘anti-fascist’ and noted that ‘when America fought England for her liberty, it was called the war of independence: when India fought England for the same purpose, it was called the Indian Mutiny.’⁷¹⁵ Women like Chattopadhyay and Batlivala were blazing a path for Indian men as well: when contemplating his own visit to America, Menon sought the views of Chattopadhyay on campaigning in America, and wanted her assessment of Batlivala’s 1939 visit.⁷¹⁶

Batlivala’s 1940 trip enjoyed greater support from the India League and was motivated, in part, by her instinctive awareness of the agnotological empire, specifically that ‘Congress viewpoints’ were not being ‘adequately ventilated by the BBC’ so that nobody in Britain ‘heard what Gandhi and Nehru said.’⁷¹⁷ She believed that there was no avenue to counter this within the empire because even ‘Thomas Cook & Sons in India worked hand-in-hand with the British secret service’⁷¹⁸ and she wished to make contacts with the American Broadcasting Corporation. In preparation, Batlivala had to evade the attentions of the imperial state. Noting that the Ministry of Information was ‘on her tracks’⁷¹⁹ she decided not to speak at the Left Book Club, lest that association be used against her in America. Her very ability to travel to America represented a victory for the India League. During her first American visit, in 1939,

⁷¹⁴ Ibid, 1-2.

⁷¹⁵ BLI, ‘Precis of Lecture Given by Miss Bhicoo Batlivala’, 8.3.1939, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/632.

⁷¹⁶ IPI to Silver, 18.5.1940, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

⁷¹⁷ IPI, Miss Bhicoo Batlivala, n.d., BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/632.

⁷¹⁸ IPI, Bhicoo Batlivala, 26.1.1940, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/632.

⁷¹⁹ IPI, Miss Bhicoo Batlivala, n.d., BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/632.

the India Office had tasked the BLI with reporting her speeches back to London,⁷²⁰ none of which endeared her to its mandarins. When faced with her second trip they were undecided on whether to resist it, feeling that her visit might demonstrate to the USA ‘a very adequate demonstration of British democracy.’⁷²¹ The debate proved to be short and IPI was soon scrambling to deny Batlivala’s request for a passport, fearing that ‘she may indulge in anti-British propaganda re India and thereby cause a revulsion of feeling against us in the United States, with possible serious consequences for the conduct of the war.’⁷²² This was part of a wider effort to pressure the Ministry of Information to prevent ‘Congress speakers from getting opportunities of propaganda against HMG in neutral countries.’⁷²³ According to IPI, because Menon disliked her (there seems to be no evidence of this) he was ‘not likely to interest any of his Labour Party associates in any complaints she may make regarding the refusal of an exit permit.’⁷²⁴ The India Office changed course again, however, after the British Ambassador decided that a ‘refusal would give rise to undesirable publicity and criticism.’ The India League’s ability to raise issues in Parliament thus preserved the citizenship rights of the Indian diaspora (demonstrating their fragility) and thereby helped maintain the anticolonial subversiveness of their spatial mobility. The India Office could not be inactive, however, and decided to send a rival lecturer, particularly ‘a Moslem lecturer...to correct the widespread impression that Congress speaks for all India.’⁷²⁵ They obtained the services of Yusuf Ali, who assured them that he would not let on that he was acting ‘behalf of the British government.’⁷²⁶

⁷²⁰ Wilberforce to Joyce, 16.11.1938, BL/IOR/I/1/1295.

⁷²¹ Hennessy to Joyce, 17.1.1930, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/623.

⁷²² IPI to Silver, 1.12.1939, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/632.

⁷²³ Dibdin to Under-Secretary of State for India, 9.11.1939, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/623.

⁷²⁴ IPI to Silver, 1.12.39, BL/L/PJ/12/631.

⁷²⁵ Lord Lothian to India Office, 9.12.1939, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/631.

⁷²⁶ India Office to British Embassy, Washington, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/631.

More than Ali, the America that Batlivala traversed had been inscribed by *Mother India*, a book written by Katherine Mayo (with the support of British officials responsible for propaganda⁷²⁷) to undermine the national movement and justify British rule. As Mrinalini Sinha puts it in her outstanding work on *Mother India*, ‘the point of these facts was to demonstrate that all the political, economic, and social problems of India had a single cause, and that cause – not to be found in the nature of the colonial state or its policies – was the essence of the beliefs and practices of Hinduism’ and that the ‘social backwardness of India disqualifies Indians from any further political advancement toward future self-government.’⁷²⁸ Mayo and the IBA were, apparently, of the same mind. The India League was no stranger to *Mother India*: One of Menon’s first acts upon joining the CIL was to advise its Secretary to circulate Lala Lajpat Rai’s *Unhappy India*, noting that it was ‘written in reply’⁷²⁹ to *Mother India*. In 1929 Graham Pole, Lady Emily Lutyens, and others submitted a resolution to a CIL protest meeting that:

deplored the gross misrepresentation of Indian life as contained in such books as *Mother India* by Miss Katherine Mayo. It further declares that the British government in India cannot hold itself free from responsibility for the illiteracy and general ignorance of the people in British India, and that the true remedy for the ills afflicting India is complete Home Rule within the Commonwealth of Nations⁷³⁰

Another entanglement with Mayo came through the feminist MP, Eleanor Rathbone. Rathbone had been converted from a ‘deferential, almost servile’ view of Mayo to a position of hostility thanks to the arguments of Indian feminists and social reformers liked Dhanvanthi

⁷²⁷ Manoharan Jha, *Katherine Mayo and India* (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1971).

⁷²⁸ Mrinalini Sinha, *Spectres of Mother India*, 5.

⁷²⁹ Menon to Redfern, 17.2.1928, NMMP/KMP/194.

⁷³⁰ CIL, Minutes of Meeting, 29.11.1929, NMML/KMP/169.

Rama Rao, who convinced her that the *Sarda* act was the result of campaigning by Indian reformers. Rathbone ‘began to wonder whether there might be truth in Rama Rao’s claim that the Government of India was to blame for India’s social problems.’⁷³¹ Visiting India, she experienced the same anticolonial epiphany that the *Condition of India* sought to produce: she was now revolted by the ‘the completely arbitrary powers given the police and the suddenness and secrecy with which they act.’⁷³² To her, ‘India seemed like Russia under the Tsar’ and so her ‘divorce from Katherine Mayo’⁷³³ was now complete. Rathbone brought out *Child Marriage: The Indian Minotaur*, which placed at least some of the blame for Indian social ills upon a supine government and thus ‘removed the ground for a straightforwardly imperialist response.’⁷³⁴ Although she continued to hold a superior attitude towards India, she was now willing to attend an India League meeting to welcome back Wilkinson, Whately and the others after their 1932 visit to India, where Wilkinson also denounced the ‘ruthless police terrorism’⁷³⁵ found throughout India.

As late as the 1950s ‘*Mother India* was second only to the works of Rudyard Kipling in the Unites States as the most popular source of information about India.’⁷³⁶ This was partly because it was subject to renewal: Cornelia Sorabji had favourably reviewed Mayo’s work and toured America in the early 1930s, defending the British *Raj* by restating the arguments of *Mother India*.⁷³⁷ Antoinette Burton has noted the *Bombay Chronicle* reporting that Sorabji was in danger of ‘outmayoing Mayo’ in her characterisations of Indian women.⁷³⁸ In 1940, therefore, Batlivala had to contend against the afterlives of Mayo’s obsessions with ‘the

⁷³¹ Susan Pederson, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 242-243.

⁷³² Cited in Susan Pederson, *Eleanor Rathbone*, 253.

⁷³³ *Ibid*, 253.

⁷³⁴ *Ibid*, 260.

⁷³⁵ *Inf.*, note on the India League Delegation n.d., BL/IOR/L/I/1/50.

⁷³⁶ Mrinalini Sinha, *Spectres of Mother India*, 25.

⁷³⁷ Sayan Chattopadhyay, ‘Disowning “Indianness”: Images of Indian Womanhood and the “English Self” of Cornelia Sorabji’, *Prose Studies* 37:1 (2015), 2-20,17.

⁷³⁸ Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 68.

alleged sexual obsession of the Hindus,' their 'child marriages and premature maternity' as well as the 'rampant masturbation and homosexuality'⁷³⁹ that Mayo attributed to Hindu men. The main problem, however, was Indian women: their birth practices, early marriage and 'feeble and diseased ancestry.'⁷⁴⁰ As Sinha points out, 'many of Mayo's leading critics appropriated her "facts" only to reverse the basic interpretive grid of the book: the "social" backwardness of India, they now argued, was the result of the "political" condition of colonial rule.'⁷⁴¹ Batlivala's own reversal of Mayo was made explicit in the *Seattle Times* which ran a 'page-wide banner headline' entitled 'BHICOO BATLIVALA TELLS OF "MOTHER INDIA'S" FIGHT' which was against 'the system of imperialism which allowed the domination and economic exploitation of country by another.' In supporting this, Batlivala 'enumerated the small amounts that are allowed India for education, health activities and agricultural research.'⁷⁴² Batlivala was at pains to emphasize the representation of women in Congress and asserted that 'there has always been sex equality in India'⁷⁴³ and that Indian women had been emancipated 'until the arrival of the British.' The 'so-called "child marriages" that Mayo obsessed over were 'nothing more than mere ceremonies.'⁷⁴⁴ Her denials of any gender inequality are, no doubt, erasures of actually-existing patriarchy that unquestionably arises from traditional social relationships. What renders this necessary, however, is the logic of *Mother India* that for as long as such oppressions existed, India could make no claim to independence. It is therefore a strategic essentialism that does entail an erasure but also reveals the paradox of empire: reluctant to pursue that very course of social reform that might make its 'civilising mission' less acutely needed.

⁷³⁹ Sinha, *Spectres of Mother India*, 5.

⁷⁴⁰ Katherine Mayo, *Mother India*, 98.

⁷⁴¹ Mrinalini Sinha, *Spectres of Mother India*, 6.

⁷⁴² *The Seattle Times*, 1.3.1940, see BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/631.

⁷⁴³ *The Washington Post*, 4.3.1939.

⁷⁴⁴ IPI, Precise of Press Cuttings concerning Mrs. Guy Mansell, otherwise Bhicoo Batlivala, 13.3.1940, in IPI to Silver 13.6.1940, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/631.

Batlivala refused to limit her anticolonialism to debates about Indian women. In San Francisco a meeting of 2,000 women gathered to hear her attack Britain's claim 'to be fighting to restore the liberty of certain peoples – but what is the difference between Poland, Czechoslovakia and India?' She appealed 'to other democracies to force Britain to yield to the demand of the original people'⁷⁴⁵ of India. The old India League language of antifascism was aired in a new place as Batlivala described 'British policy as "high handed arbitrary Fascism."⁷⁴⁶ The *Boston Globe* reported Batlivala's bespoke argument that 'the Moslems and the Hindus do not agree on all internal politics – but look at your Democrats and Republicans. What would Americans say if Hitler announced that because of the lack of agreement between the two parties he had decided that America was not united?'⁷⁴⁷

Batlivala's journey to America appears to have generated more mainstream press attention than years of India League appeals to Britain's newspapers. The BLI reported that 'The Associated Press and International News Service gave Miss Batlivala wide publicity.' A memorandum from the British Consulate General in San Francisco stated that Batlivala's lecture 'was disturbingly convincing even to one who has heard the British viewpoint on India's right to self-government...her voice and eloquence did much to enhance an already extremely well-planned lecture, which consisted mainly of an impressive stream of historical facts, dates and spiritual politics...the lecture was very well received.' The BLI conceded that they had 'underestimated her powers as a propagandist.'⁷⁴⁸ The head of the BLI, Robert Wilberforce, listened in to an interview with Batlivala broadcast on a highbrow station attached to New York Public Radio. He told London that Batlivala showed 'an instinct for stating the case in a way which would convince an American audience ignorant of but

⁷⁴⁵ Originally in *Voce Del Populo* an Italian-language periodical of San Francisco, 14.3.1940, in IPI's *Precis of Press Cuttings*, IPI to Silver 13.6.1940, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/631.

⁷⁴⁶ Originally in *Daily News* of Los Angeles 16.3.1940 in IPI's *Precis of Press Cuttings*, IPI to Silver, 13.6.1940, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/632.

⁷⁴⁷ Originally in *Boston Globe*, 25.1.1940 in BLI, Report No. 46, 29.1.1940, relayed by IPI to Silver, 13.6.1930, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

⁷⁴⁸ BLI, Report on Miss Bhicoo Batlivala, 3.4.1940, relayed by IPI to Silver, 13.6.1940, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/632.

interested in the subject and prejudiced against British rule.’ Wilberforce’s conclusion was that ‘if the interview is any indication of the way she spoke in her recent tour of the United States she must, I fear, have done much harm to our prestige.’⁷⁴⁹

As Stephen Legg points out, the relationship between women and anticolonial nationalism can be about ‘women as *representations*’ of the nation and ‘female *participation* in nationalist projects.’ Often ‘in anti-colonial contexts, women were paraded as symbols of a new, modern nation’...while also embodying tradition and the past.’⁷⁵⁰ Within this ambiguous framework, Rosalind Parr has usefully noted that the ‘self-presentation as educated, expert women had important symbolic value as it served to delegitimise the imperial claim that India was not yet ready to rule itself.’⁷⁵¹ A claim which found its most scandalous expression in *Mother India*. Batlivala’s gendered self-presentation was therefore an important adjunct to the arguments she marshalled, as an example of Indian womanhood entirely compatible with self-rule and political modernity. The *Seattle Times* noted ‘the enchantment, the fascination, the brilliance and stimulation’ of Batlivala who ‘talked like Socrates’ but a Socrates ‘who looks like a glamour girl.’⁷⁵² The *Los Angeles Examiner* described her as a ‘slender, titian-haired and dark-eyed Indian girl’ who was in America to ‘excoriate Great Britain’s attitude to her native land.’⁷⁵³ The *Washington Post* commented on her ‘trim figure well-adapted to wearing the sari,’⁷⁵⁴ a ‘sari of purple edged with a band of gold embroidery.’⁷⁵⁵ The *Seattle Times* article on Batlivala declared that ‘if I were that versatile and brilliant, I’d wear a Sari right down Fifth Avenue and never blink an eye!’⁷⁵⁶ In colonial India the sari had been ‘a

⁷⁴⁹ Wilberforce to Joyce 24.4.1940, BL/IOR/L/I/1/1295.

⁷⁵⁰ Stephen Legg, ‘Gendered Politics and Nationalised Homes, Women and the anticolonial struggle in Delhi, 1930-47’, *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 10: 1 (2010), 7-27, 10.

⁷⁵¹ Rosalind Parr, *Citizens of Everywhere*, 6.

⁷⁵² *Seattle Times*, 1.3.1940, see BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/632.

⁷⁵³ *Los Angeles Examiner*, 5.3.1940, see BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/632.

⁷⁵⁴ *The Washington Post* 29.1.1940, see BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/632.

⁷⁵⁵ *Seattle Times*, 1.3.1940, see BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/632.

⁷⁵⁶ *Seattle Times*, 1.3.1940, see BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/632.

trope of the exotic Indian woman' and part of the 'anthropological project of fixing people in a given space-time,'⁷⁵⁷ namely the stasis necessary for the justification for tutelary imperialism. The sari was also, however, associated with the nationalist symbol of Mother India (no relation to Mayo), dressed in particular drapes such as the *Nivi*, which could stand in as a national Sari over the vast regional and community-based variations.⁷⁵⁸ Chattopadhyay and Sarojini Naidu wore saris to an international conference of women in 1929.⁷⁵⁹ Annie Besant's theosophical, syncretistic figure of the "World Mother" was represented by the sari-wearing Rukmini Devi.⁷⁶⁰ The importance of anticolonial clothes was not limited to women. The Mahatma's dress was a deliberate and potent source of his symbolic power. Gandhi rejected the anglicised clothing of the middle-class lawyer for the clothes of the labourer and the ascetic. It was the insertion of this inverted sartorial symbolism and its rejection of both anglicisation and British fabulism of a hierarchal, feudal, India culminating in the King-Emperor that so incensed Churchill, leading him to denounce the half-naked fakir ascending the steps of the viceregal palace. For nationalist men, dress was crucial, and few were vainer in this regard than Nehru. Even the sartorially westernised Jinnah acknowledged the all-important Lucknow session of Muslim League by swapping his Saville Row suit for 'a black Punjabi sherwani' and borrowing Nawab Mohammad Ismail Khan's 'black Persian lamb cap,' thus creating the 'Jinnah cap'⁷⁶¹ which quickly became iconic of the Quaid-e-Azam. The British could also participate in this irruptive sartorial politics. Cripps, pointedly, removed his shoes in the presence of Gandhi, an impossible gesture for Anglo-India. Fenner Brockway even brought a Gandhi cap inside the House of Commons to protest its criminalisation by martial law in Sholapur. He asked the Secretary of State whether he really considered 'that

⁷⁵⁷ Kaamyia Sharma 'The Orientalisation of the Sari – Sartorial Praxis and Womanhood in Colonial and Post-Colonial India' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 42: 2 (2019), 219-236, 221.

⁷⁵⁸ Kaamyia Sharma, 'How to Dress a National Elite: The Case of the Kalakshetra Sari' *International Quarterly of Asian Studies* 48: 1-2 (2017), 33-53, 34.

⁷⁵⁹ Rosalind Parr, *Citizens of Everywhere*, 31.

⁷⁶⁰ Kaamyia Sharma, 'How to Dress,' 37.

⁷⁶¹ Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah*, 152.

the wearing of a simple cap of this kind is dangerous to British administration in India?’⁷⁶²

Tories shouted at him to ‘put it on’ which he did, a simple gesture that exposed the authoritarian absurdities of the British Empire. When he landed in India in 1927 a welcoming committee of the Indian trades unionists and Congress members presented him with another cap to commemorate his ‘honouring it in Parliament.’⁷⁶³

Khadi, more broadly, provided a ‘common visual vocabulary through which a population separated by language, religion, caste, class and region communicated their political dissent and their visions of community.’ Dress was a ‘potent identity-maker’⁷⁶⁴ and, as Lisa Trivedi describes, *khadi* was ‘a material artifact of the nation’ and one that sought to strike a ‘balance between “tradition” and “modernity.”’⁷⁶⁵ This had its counterpart in the handloom sari, associated with India’s rich indigenous handicraft tradition.⁷⁶⁶ The sari was therefore ‘a material symbol of the nation, draped and duly contained from rapid erosion by English mill-made fabrics and the tyranny of colonial rule.’⁷⁶⁷ Chattopadhyay, who toured America at the same time as Batlivala, would stage ‘craft revitalisation as an essential national building activity.’⁷⁶⁸ Thus, the ‘interwar feminist movement successfully mobilised... orientalist anxieties about loss of native culture and taste to produce a sartorial model of ideal womanhood which permitted elite women revivalists the contingent freedoms of public space and agency.’⁷⁶⁹ Thus, while IPI’s informant held that Batlivala ‘was a victim of being denationalised’⁷⁷⁰ we might prefer to see Batlivala’s political selfhood in terms of what Seyla

⁷⁶² HC Deb. 14.7.1930, vol. 241 col. 900.

⁷⁶³ Brockway, *Towards Tomorrow*, 95.

⁷⁶⁴ Nira Wickramasinghe, *Dressing the Colonized Body: Politics, Clothing and Identity in Sri Lanka* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2003), 124.

⁷⁶⁵ Lisa N. Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi’s Nation: Homespun and Modern India* (Indiana University Press, 2007), xvii-xx.

⁷⁶⁶ Kaamya Sharma ‘The Orientalisation of the Sari,’ 231.

⁷⁶⁷ Aarti Kawlra, ‘Sari and the Narrative of Nation in 20th Century India’, *Global Textile Encounters* eds. Marie-Louise Nosch, Zhao Feng and Lotika Varadarajan (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), 217.

⁷⁶⁸ Kaamya Sharma, ‘The Orientalisation of the Sari,’ 232.

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 235.

⁷⁷⁰ A former Private Secretary (personal identity unclear, initials: ‘C.E.N’) working for the Maharaja of Baroda to Joyce, 17.1.1940, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/1295.

Benhabib calls ‘the unique and fragile achievement of selves in weaving together conflicting narratives and allegiances into a unique life history,’⁷⁷¹ which Rosalind Parr very usefully identifies as a ‘cosmopolitan-nationalism’⁷⁷² or even a modern pan-Indianness in which the sari represents not the fixture of the Indian woman in colonial stasis, but the conquest of the freedoms of public space and agency.

Batlivala’s cosmopolitan, anticolonial and nationalist political subjectivity refuted Mayo’s caricaturing of Indian women, but it also rejected the role prepared for her by India’s nationalist movement. As Michael Ortiz notes ‘anti-colonial women were often restricted to local advocacy and organisation’⁷⁷³ in India, due to conservative fears about them entering public life. Partha Chatterjee has famously written of a nationalist discourse in which orientalist constructions of the oppressed Indian woman in need of rescuing by empire are forcefully rejected by a nationalism, which nevertheless limits women to the home as the guardians of the uncontaminated spiritual values of the nation.⁷⁷⁴ Legg has noted, however, the ways in which ‘women achieved agency in a nationalist movement.’⁷⁷⁵ Chatterjee has been critiqued by Kamala Visweswaran and others, who point out that his theory ‘does not fashion a space in which her agency can be demonstrated.’⁷⁷⁶ What we can take from this debate is the sense that Indian anticolonial nationalism had prepared no *natural* role for a Chattopadhyay, Pandit or Batlivala, who would therefore have to fashioned it themselves. In doing so, Batlivala, like the India League, was unconcerned by conservative anxieties over the nation. There was no need to seek out any repositories of an authentic culture in the home, guarded by women and there was no risk of returning to tradition or reactionary forms in its

⁷⁷¹ Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in a Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 16.

⁷⁷² Rosalind Parr, *Citizens of Everywhere*, 3.

⁷⁷³ Michael Ortiz, *Anti-colonialism*, 11.

⁷⁷⁴ Partha Chatterjee, ‘Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India’, *American Ethnologist*, 16: 4 (1989) 622-623, 632.

⁷⁷⁵ Stephen Legg, ‘Gendered Politics,’ 7.

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 12.

quest for a national authenticity because her politics, like the India League, was far more against empire than for the nation.

Batlivala was therefore free to project a political selfhood in America that was inescapably that of an Indian woman (if an elite one), symbolised by her sari, but one that did not conform to the subordinated householding virtues of ‘chastity, submission, devotion’⁷⁷⁷ valorised by conservative nationalism. Instead, at a ‘gala breakfast’ which was thrown in her honour, Bhicoo Batlivala occupied a political space that neither empire nor nationalism would have necessarily afforded her: between Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black and Senator Theodore Green, after which she spoke to an audience that included four members of the House of Representatives.⁷⁷⁸ *The Washington Post* declared that ‘social lights and officials...were all but swept off their feet by Bhicoo Batlivala.’⁷⁷⁹ In pursuing her anticolonialism Batlivala broke barriers of gender that were not just Indian or imperial but universal, providing new access to elite spaces: ‘The Harvard Club of Boston broke their custom of having only men address them in order to hear Miss Batlivala present the reasons why India should be granted its independence.’⁷⁸⁰ Batlivala’s argumentation was supported by her modern Indian and gendered selfhood. Batlivala is simultaneously modern, emancipated, Indian and a woman, that very combination that Mayo held to be entirely impossible. Mayo’s tropes of Indian womanhood were, however, overwritten by Batlivala’s tour of America, a space that was beyond the formal control of empire yet very important to its security. Unsurprisingly, this led to angry denunciations from the author of *Mother India*.⁷⁸¹

⁷⁷⁷ Partha Chatterjee ‘Colonialism, Nationalism and Colonialized Women,’ 629.

⁷⁷⁸ *The Washington Post*, 29.1.1940.

⁷⁷⁹ *The Washington Post* 10.2.1940 in BLI Report No. 74, 10.2.1940, relayed by IPI to Silver, 13.6.1940, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/632.

⁷⁸⁰ BLI, Report No. 46, 29.1.1940, relayed by IPI to Silver, 13.6.1940 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/632.

⁷⁸¹ Katherine Mayo to Elena Richmond, 22.2.1940, RP XXV.1.273, Rathbone Papers, University of Liverpool Archives.

IPI's usual strategy to counter anticolonialists was to compile dossiers of embarrassing information. With male activists, the usual strategy was to label them as extremists, communists or even terrorists and so their sexual history was rarely detailed. That was not the case with Batlivala. As the BLI was arranging speakers to debate her⁷⁸² and in building a case against her, the India Office obtained accounts of her service in Baroda from the former Secretary to the Maharaja. In addition to noting that she 'made a nuisance of herself' because she 'talked too much' the Secretary informed the India Office about her 'affair with an Army officer' and that she 'craves notoriety...it does not matter whether with the Gaekwar [Maharaja of Baroda], or HH [sic] of Jaipur, Nehru, London Society or a young subaltern. I have seen her hunt them all – anything in trousers, but if they are distinguished trousers, so much the better.'⁷⁸³ In turn the India Office informed the BLI that Batlivala and Nehru were rumoured to have had an affair and detailed the accompanying scandal,⁷⁸⁴ equating Indian female anticolonial agency with sexual deviance.

The India League and the Working-Class Diaspora: the Making of an Anticolonial Constituency at the Heart of Empire

The membership of the India League was dominated by elites like Batlivala, but the League also succeeded in rallying the subaltern British Indian diaspora in its campaign against British imperialism. The methods and arguments which were used were quite different to the ones used to lobby Labour, however. While the former braided languages of socialism and antifascism, the latter required something else: the language of brotherhood, the emotional repertoire of nostalgia and outrage. It also demanded mobilisational techniques that could

⁷⁸² BLI to Joyce, 27.1.1940, BL/IO/L/I/1/1295.

⁷⁸³ 'C.E.N.' to Joyce, 17.1.1940, BL/IO/L/PJ/12/1295.

⁷⁸⁴ Joyce to Wilberforce, 2.11.1938, BL/IO/L/I/1/1295.

across barriers of language and education, including the use of music and theatre in rallying Indians in Britain against the British Empire in India.

Establishing the India League as a broad diasporic organisation is a challenge because, while the organisation's political effectiveness derived from its refusal to limit itself to Indian membership, this often made it unpopular with a restive Indian diaspora that might see its method of lobbying Labour as embarrassingly supplicatory. The police recorded a meeting where two Indian seamen stated that they had no desire for the India League to work in the East End of London because political work should 'be carried on by the seamen themselves.' The police reported that 'the meeting was very boisterous at times...and heated arguments took place between supporters and opponents who, in some cases, nearly came to blows....there were various allegations by others that Menon was playing the Government's game by siding with the Communist Party.'⁷⁸⁵ One S. Vaidya told Menon that 'Indians looked upon the India League as an English organisation' which is why he had worked towards establishing Swaraj House.⁷⁸⁶ In addition to Swaraj House, the League had to compete with the Subhas Chandra Bose-aligned Committee of Indian Congressmen and the Indian Freedom Campaign Committee. Despite these divisions, the India League still managed to articulate a distinctively diasporic anticolonialism: A 1942 emergency meeting of Indians held to discuss the failure of the Cripps Mission passed a resolution that proclaimed 'we Indians resident in the United Kingdom, assembled in conference in this grave hour of our country's history proclaim our allegiance to the Indian National Congress.'⁷⁸⁷ This was a clear and plangent, if somewhat futile, gesture of frustration that rejected the ambiguities and marginalities of westernisation in favour of a unambiguously anticolonial political affiliation.

⁷⁸⁵ ENSYR, 23.6.1932, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁷⁸⁶ ENSYR, 17.2.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁷⁸⁷ ENSYR, 26.4.42, relayed by IPI to Silver, 30.4.42, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/454.

Officials were more alarmed by the India League's influence over Indian students in Britain, especially its connections with the well-organised Cambridge Majlis and the University Labour Federation, (ULF). The ULF had passed progressive resolutions on India and written pamphlets that achieved wide circulation among students. IPI firmly believed the ULF to be behind Indian student disaffection 'with the assistance of Menon and his satellites.'⁷⁸⁸ The Viceroy was concerned, holding that 'the part played by students in the political life of this country [Britain] is by no means negligible.'⁷⁸⁹ Linlithgow blamed disaffection on Indian students having no social contact with the better class of families, leaving them on a pure diet of 'Harold Laski's lectures.'⁷⁹⁰ He even warned Vice-Chancellors about 'the poisoning of Indian minds at British Universities'⁷⁹¹ and there was serious talk of reducing Indian student numbers.⁷⁹²

It is with the Indian diaspora that the India League's production of insurgent sociability appears at its most radical, using characteristically diasporic spaces to break through boundaries of race and class. Rehana Ahmed points out that such spaces worked as a 'kind of "contact zone" for Britons and South Asians and for cross-class interactions among South Asian inhabitants of London.'⁷⁹³ This included the Bengal Indian restaurant on Percy Street where Mulk Raj Anand, Reginald Bridgeman and Michael Carritt ate with Indians like Shah Abdul Majid Qureshi, a 'Sylheti migrant who travelled to Britain as a lascar in 1936 and jumped ship at Tilbury Docks.'⁷⁹⁴ Not long after the large and successful Coliseum meeting of 1944, sixty Indians gathered at the Bengal Indian Restaurant to pass resolutions 'in which

⁷⁸⁸ IPI to Silver, 4.4.1930, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/638.

⁷⁸⁹ Linlithgow to Amery, 12.9.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/638.

⁷⁹⁰ Linlithgow to Amery, 2.11.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/638.

⁷⁹¹ V.T. Bayley to Vice-Chancellors, 21.3.1941, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/638.

⁷⁹² Hallett to Linlithgow, 23.1.1941, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/638.

⁷⁹³ Rehana Ahmed 'Networks of Resistance: Krishna Menon and Working-Class South Asians in Inter-War Britain' *South Asian Resistances*, 99.

⁷⁹⁴ Rehana Ahmed 'Networks,' 98.

they expressed their appreciation and wholehearted support for the work of the India League.⁷⁹⁵ This sentiment was soon formalised into a ‘Central Indian Committee’⁷⁹⁶ (CIC). This comprised Rewel Singh, Shiv Singh Jauhal, Dr. P.C. Bhandari, Saeedi Mohamedi, N Gangulee, Mrs Handoo, Mrs Khanna and others: a mix of firebrand activists and respectable middle-class professionals. The CIC began holding its own meetings to raise funds for the wider League.⁷⁹⁷ There was even a campaign among Indian doctors practicing in Britain to ‘guarantee a fixed annual subscription to the League.’⁷⁹⁸ At a meeting at a Chinese restaurant on Wardour Street, long-time Indian supporters of the League, including Batlivala, Rewel Singh, Ayub Ali, Mulk Raj Anand, as well as new members like Gurdian Singh, a pilot of the Royal Indian Air Force, gathered to rectify the situation where ‘poor Krishna Menon works here 24 hours a day and exists on cups of tea.’ Indian supporters pledged between £12 and £25 a year, taking the India League’s guaranteed annual income up to £420. The CIC was also ‘empowered to enter into conversations with other groups...with a view to furthering unity among the Indian Community.’⁷⁹⁹ Part of this campaign was to reach out to Indians in the East End⁸⁰⁰ where most of the work was undertaken by Indian women.⁸⁰¹ An earlier attempt to mobilise in the East End in 1941 had had mixed results, with relatively few attendees at an inaugural meeting. The meeting did select, however, delegates to an important India League Conference where they mixed with TUC delegates, four Labour MPs and Lord Farringdon. It is difficult to think of a similar space where an old Etonian peer would be a co-delegate with representatives of the British Indian working class, evidence of the India League’s capacity for creating radical sociability.

⁷⁹⁵ ENSYR, 17.2.1943, BL/IO/L/PJ/12/455.

⁷⁹⁶ IL/EC, 3.2.1943, KMP/NMML/176.

⁷⁹⁷ ENSYR, 3.3.1943, BL/IO/L/PJ/12/455.

⁷⁹⁸ IPI to Silver, 10.9.1943, BL/IO/L/PJ/455.

⁷⁹⁹ ENSYR, 9.7.1943, BL/IO/L/PJ/12/455.

⁸⁰⁰ ENSYR, 9.6.1943, BL/IO/L/PJ/12/455.

⁸⁰¹ ENSYR, 23.7.1943, BL/IO/L/PJ/12/455.

Thanks to the well-resourced and productively paranoid IPI following the India League deep into the British Indian diaspora, its archive affords a rich and rare glimpse into subaltern diasporic anticolonialism, including its quotidian practices, emotional repertoires and hybridising ideologies. We are permitted to observe the gestures by which, to use Zaib un-Nisa Aziz's phrasing, subaltern exiles 'actively created the imagined community they claimed to represent.'⁸⁰² This was the pan-Indian sensibility of an anticolonial brotherhood, a complement to the anticolonial friendship of the India League's other campaign among the British left-wing. The pamphlet used to advertise an India League meeting in the East End used very different language to the ones used to rally Labour (literally: it was written in Urdu). 'Indian brothers – the India League is holding a meeting at St. George's Hall, Cable St., on Saturday August 9th at 6:30 p.m. You are earnestly requested to come. Long Live Revolution!' (In the archive, that last word is earnestly underlined by an IPI always seeking evidence of the criminal danger of the Indian diaspora). At the meeting, one Islam al-Haque spoke in Hindustani in favour of the Soviet Union and against the demand for Pakistan. He was followed by a Rohail Singh who averred that 'it was the duty of Indians to see that Britain did not exploit the mythical grievances between Muslims and Hindus.' A Bal Raj spoke in Punjabi and appealed 'for unity among all classes and quoted the example of Soviet Russia where there were no Zemindars or Talukdars having any vested interests.' For all the confusion of tongues, the attendees then joined together in singing *Sare Jahan Se Accha* (better than the entire world, is our Hindustan), composed by Mohammad Iqbal. This song evokes the deep nostalgia that is an inevitability of the diasporic condition, including the lines that 'religion does not teach us to bear animosity among ourselves, we are of Hind, our homeland is Hindustan.' Thus, a subaltern and diasporic pan-Indianess was posited against the imperialist ideologies of unbridgeable Hindu-Muslim difference being actively circulated. The virtue of this intermingling and sociability was not lost on the participants. The Chair of

⁸⁰² Zaib un-Nisa Aziz, 'Indian anti-colonialism in exile,' 412.

the meeting made an appeal for a place where ‘Indians of all classes should meet.’⁸⁰³ IPI soon noted that Menon was contemplating an India League branch in the East End. A location was duly leased off Ayub Ali, proprietor of the Shah Jolal restaurant, which had already become a hub for East End Indians.⁸⁰⁴ Menon promised to relay to Ali’s café and the East London branch, ‘vernacular newspapers and periodicals...especially those in Bengali’⁸⁰⁵ that he received from India.

In addition to being an anticolonial hub for the working-class diaspora, the East End India League was also a node for maritime connections. Menon had supported a lascar strike in 1939 and had transmitted complaints from the Indian Seamen’s Union to Members of Parliament.⁸⁰⁶ East End meetings soon attracted factory workers and Bengali ex-seamen.⁸⁰⁷ Lecture classes were held four times a week ‘for the purpose of giving political and educational instruction to merchant seamen.’ At one of these classes an Indian sailor said that it was the ‘patriotic duty of every Indian to support Congress in the right to rid India of British domination.’ He added that he and his comrades from HMIS *Kistna* ‘had been visiting the India League office at 165 Strand W.C. and that he had himself been given quantities of literature which he had distributed among his colleagues.’⁸⁰⁸ On another occasion, three Indian Navy Ratings from HMIS *Kistna* visited the India League offices where they were supplied with India League literature. At a café in Whitechurch Lane they then ‘joined in a bitterly anti-British discussion’ with Rewel Singh and other India Leaguers where ‘the sailors complained of terrible starvation conditions in India, alleging that thousands were dying of hunger.’ Singh pointed out that ‘any Indian who risked his life bringing food to this country,

⁸⁰³ IPI, Copy of Metropolitan Police Report on East End Meeting Held by Krishna Menon on 9.8.41, relayed by IPI to Silver, 12.8.41 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/454.

⁸⁰⁴ ENSYR, 13.10.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁸⁰⁵ ENSYR, 13.10.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁸⁰⁶ IPI to Silver, 7.11.1939, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/630.

⁸⁰⁷ ENSYR, 13.10.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁸⁰⁸ ENSYR, 22.12.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

while his own people were starving, was a fool.’⁸⁰⁹ Although HMIS *Kistna* did not participate in the 1946 Bombay Mutiny there is a strong probability that these three sailors were part of the same radical maritime thought zone as those that did: One of their number, Abdur Rahman ‘had been in trouble on board ship for expressing his political views.’⁸¹⁰ Here, again, it must be stressed that this private conversation was monitored by the police and collated by IPI: surveillance in Britain in defence of the Empire had very little limit to its paranoid extent.

As with the Coliseum meeting, a larger network enabled a diverse and creative cultural method. In 1944 the India League held an ‘Amritsar Memorial Meeting’ for ‘East End Indians’ led by Menon, Shiva Rao, Sorensen Anand. A play by Anand was performed, which portrayed the Amritsar massacre and even the Hunter Commission. It insisted that Amritsar was not an exception to colonial rule by citing Dyer’s speech which conceded that ‘he gave the order to fire on the crowd, not only to disperse them, but to create respect for authority throughout the Punjab.’ De-exceptioning was further achieved by the drawing of a ‘parallel between Amritsar and the present day,’ a reference to the brutal suppression of Quit India, which served ‘as a warning to those people who believed in the continuance of the British Empire and the abnegation of liberty and economic freedom.’⁸¹¹ Dramatic sketches were becoming the preferred method for campaigning among East End Indians. In 1944 the East London Branch held a public meeting at the Grand Palais on Commercial Road in Aldgate, to welcome S.A. Dange, who shared a platform with Sorensen, a local borough Councillor and Indians from the CIC. Indian songs were sung, followed by a play:

“the toilers of India” a tableau in which three persons representing a peasant, a landless labourer and a fisherwoman bemoan their misfortune and their exploitation

⁸⁰⁹ ENSYR, 4.8.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁸¹⁰ ENSYR, 4.8.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁸¹¹ ENSYR, 26.4.1944, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

by the authorities, with a commentary on India's scenic beauty and mineral wealth. Then followed a series of lantern slides depicting various Indian scenes and including gruesome illustrations of the emaciated bodies of men, women and children victims of the famine.'⁸¹²

Thus, colonial violence and economic nationalism, those two core components of the India League's anticolonialism, was translated into accessible drama in which India serves as a mythical and moral symbol against colonialism. Despite its anglophone campaigning, British membership and institutional focus, therefore, the India League found methods by which they could engage with members of the non-elite Indian diaspora. This was an anticolonial campaigning that sought to overcome the barriers of space, class and language to construct a pan-Indian identity based on the shared experience of colonial oppression.

The most important of the India League's diasporic campaigns was conducted in alliance with the Indian Workers Association (IWA), a labour organisation active in the West Midlands. According to IPI, membership of the IWA was largely from two Punjabi districts: Jullundur and Hoshiarpur 'which have had almost a monopoly in the supply of pedlars to the United Kingdom.'⁸¹³ Interwar colonial policy had produced rural indebtedness in this area of Punjab, pushing many labourers and peasants to seek a better life outside of British India, including in Britain. As Ali Raza has shown, there was a process by which this diaspora encountered racism within European society, which they then attributed to India's status as an 'enslaved nation,'⁸¹⁴ enabling a simultaneous politics of anticolonialism and antiracism.

⁸¹² ENSYR, 5.7.1944, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁸¹³ IPI to Silver and DIB, 15.3.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁸¹⁴ Muhammad Ali Raza 'Straddling the International and the Regional: The Punjabi Left in the Interwar Period', *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, worlds, and world views, 1917-39* eds. Muhammad Ali Raza, Roy Franziska, Benjamin Zacharia, (New Delhi: Sage, 2016), 89.

While the postwar history of the IWA has brought some scholarly attention,⁸¹⁵ its earlier, more radical anticolonial history remains largely unknown. It was formed in Coventry in 1938 ‘to coordinate the efforts of all Indians in Britain in the campaign for Indian independence.’⁸¹⁶ As a trade union, the IWA was naturally concerned with workers’ rights and evading conscription.⁸¹⁷ Rehana Ahmed has usefully demonstrated how these seemingly parochial concerns – protesting against being moved from skilled to unskilled jobs – was identifiably anticolonial as ‘this process of deskilling was motivated by the Government’s fear of Indians acquiring equivalent skills to Englishmen and so undermining the rationale for British rule.’⁸¹⁸ Thus, the labourism and anticolonialism of the organisation were twinned.

This held out the potential for collaboration with the India League. But differences remained: The India League was careful not to openly celebrate violence against Britons or British military defeats but members of the IWA openly celebrated the fact that ‘the British were being defeated everywhere’ and P.B. Seal, an IWA activist, was an ‘ardent supporter of Subhas Chandra Bose.’⁸¹⁹ The IWA did share with the India League the sensibility that the history of imperialism and fascism were interlinked: At one meeting, Chaudhri Akbar Ali Khan accused the British of allowing ‘the rape of Abyssinia and Czechoslovakia and other countries in order that England’s own imperialist system could be perpetuated.’ He also noted Churchill’s speech that held that ‘he had not become his Majesty’s First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire’ and asserted that ‘until steps were taken to ‘include India in the [Atlantic] Charter, the people of India could hardly be blamed for regarding it a useless declaration.’⁸²⁰

⁸¹⁵ See Talvinder Gill, ‘The Indian Workers Association Coventry 1938-1990: political and social action’ *South Asian History and Culture*, 4: 4 (2013), 554-537, 555.

⁸¹⁶ Talvinder Gill, ‘The Indian Workers Association’, 555.

⁸¹⁷ See Rehana Ahmed ‘Networks of Resistance.’

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁸¹⁹ IPI to Silver, 10.2.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁸²⁰ Birmingham City Police Criminal Investigation Dept ‘X’ Office, Report, 26.1.1943 in IPI to Silver 24.2.1943. BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/454.

The League and IWA also encountered each other in mutually accessible diasporic space. An IWA president, Sardar Shah, attended India League meetings alongside Dr Prem (the leader of the India League in Birmingham) at a Chinese restaurant in Soho where they met the CIC regulars.⁸²¹ This enabled mutual organisational support: In 1942, a joint meeting of the India League and the IWA was held in Birmingham, the result of which was the re-organisation of the latter with a central structure and sub-committees in Birmingham, Coventry and Bradford.⁸²² Britain's left-wing networks also provided common ground for interaction: A notable IWA meeting in 1943 drew Fenner Brockway and Vic Yates of the local India League, indicating something of a rapprochement after the India League abandoned the ILP for the Socialist League in the late thirties. With the benefit of hindsight, Brockway's speech to the IWA in 1943 appears prophetic, holding that 'Historians...will say that this war represents the end of imperialism in the world.' He also heralded something that resembled Nehru's vision of the Non-Aligned Movement as 'a great third movement will come, a rising of the common people of the whole world, of Indians, Arabs and Negroes – a movement of the people of the West Indies' though he hoped that it would include 'all the people in Europe' as 'a movement which the workers of Britain must identify themselves.' The ease with which anticolonialism could be braided with socialism can be seen through local organisational affiliations: Yates noted the affiliation of the Birmingham Labour Party to the India League and claimed that the Birmingham Party had been petitioning the national Labour Party over India for some time. A representative of the TGWU then invited the IWA to affiliate, based on the belief 'the belief that each and every worker has the right to manage his own destiny.'⁸²³

⁸²¹ ENSYR, 15.9.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁸²² IPI to Silver, 10.2.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁸²³ Birmingham City Police Criminal Investigation Department, 'X' Office to IPI, relayed to Silver, 24.2.1943 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

The life of Dr. Diwan Singh, a leader of the IWA and associate of the India League, reveals the networks and layered identities of the IWA's leadership and ideologies. Singh was also president of the *Khalsa Jatha* of the British Isles, making him an important leader of the British Sikh community. He had raised money for the legal defence of Udham Singh (the legal team included Menon) who had assassinated Michael O'Dwyer (he of the 'necessary holocaust' at Amritsar). Despite the campaign to save him, Udham Singh had accepted his fate and proclaimed his act as appropriate revenge for Amritsar. This transformed him into a martyr for organisations such as the IWA which preferred masculine Sikh users of heroic anticolonial violence rather than Gandhi. IWA speakers declared that 'All Indian people must pay homage to the memory of Bhagat Singh who struck a blow for freedom in New Delhi and Udham Singh who proved his devotion to India in England itself.'⁸²⁴ The IWA placed itself at the end of two chains of retribution anticolonial violence: Udham Singh had murdered O'Dwyer in revenge for Amritsar while Bhagat Singh had been driven towards terrorism after the alleged extrajudicial killing of the Congress leader, Lala Lajpat Rai, by a British policeman. Both had then been executed: one in India and one in Britain.

The IWA, like the India League, sought to demonstrate the violence of colonial rule. Joint meetings were scheduled to commemorate the Amritsar massacre where rumours were circulated that throughout Amritsar 'the wells had been poisoned by General Dyer.'⁸²⁵ At a different meeting, one Karim Singh Chima asserted that 'the English had cut off many heads in order to subjugate India. The only way to release India from British bondage was to employ the same methods.'⁸²⁶ Thus, the IWA concluded that they 'did not want Gandhi's old policy; what they did want was Dutt's and Bhagat Singh's.'⁸²⁷ This invocation of the Rajani

⁸²⁴ Birmingham City Police Criminal Investigation Department, X Office to IPI, relayed to Silver, 24.2.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁸²⁵ IPI to Silver 24.2.1942 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁸²⁶ Birmingham City Police Criminal Investigation Department, X Office to IPI, relayed to Silver, 24.2.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁸²⁷ IPI, India League and Indian Workers Union, 9.2.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

Palme Dutt appears surprising but perhaps the revolutionary nature of communism appealed to the IWA's directness. The organisation had some very left-leaning tendencies, entirely compatible with strong egalitarian streak in Sikhism, including the collectivity of the *panth*, demonstrated through practices such as the *langar*, or communal eating, not to mention regular mobilisations against social stratification. As Harjot Oberoi has noted, however, this egalitarianism often does not extend to non-Sikhs,⁸²⁸ and the IWA is therefore notable for its leadership by V.S.S. Sastry (from South India) and its leading role in politicising non-Sikhs, including Bengali and Assamese ex-seamen. Moreover, despite the large Sikh membership, the IWA was pan-Indian: it made no demands for separatism, made no mention of the *akalis* or Tara Singh and held that the demand for Pakistan was an illustration of the English policy of "Divide and Rule"...India would stand as a united whole.⁸²⁹

The political power of the India League in Birmingham was enhanced by an IWA which, while it was certainly given coherence and form by its Sikhism, refused the particularity of community for an unambiguously anticolonial and pan-Indian position. The IWA was part of an unusually strong collaboration that took place in the city between the League, the Communists, ILP⁸³⁰ and local Labour Party which had departed from the national party by being more favourable to Congress, despite the failure of the Cripps Mission.⁸³¹ This came together in the person of Julius Silverman, a local Councillor, future Labour MP and leader of the India League after Indian independence. These collaborations brought immediate political dividends for the India League. A League rally, chaired by Menon and including the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, local Aldermen and Lord Farringdon was successful in drawing a large audience of around 1,700 largely because members of the IWA had departed *en masse*

⁸²⁸ Harjot Oberoi, 'Sikh Fundamentalism' *Politics in India* ed. Sudipta Kaviraj (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 321.

⁸²⁹ IPI to Silver and DIB, 15.3.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁸³⁰ IPI to Silver, 11.5.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/454.

⁸³¹ IL/EC, 2.9.1942, NMML/KMP/176.

from a meeting of their own held earlier in the day. Just as at the Coliseum, British left-wing and Indian anti-colonialist solidarity produced its own form of cultural mixing: the crowd was treated to nationalist songs written by Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu, sung by one Ruth Naylor and Sayyid Iqbal Hussain Shah, which was followed by a performance by the Abertillery Miners Choir. The host city, however, was the most important feature of the event. Lord Farringdon noted that, for the mass meeting with the IWA, ‘Birmingham had been chosen for the progressive ideas of its people while also being the seat of Leopold Amery.’⁸³² Amery had campaigned in the 1918 khaki election as a Unionist in the ‘full regalia of a Lieutenant Colonel of the General Staff.’⁸³³ A staunch ideologue of empire, disciple of Alfred Milner and Joseph Chamberlain, director of multiple companies and former Secretary of Secretary of State for the Colonies, Amery was now responsible for India and the face of Churchillian extremism in Parliament.

Amery’s associations with the city of Birmingham formed a tempting ideological complex for the India League and its allies to campaign in. As Catherine Hall puts it ‘Birmingham was *of* the empire, situated within the empire, defining itself as a town through its relation to nation and empire, imbricated with empire, long before Joseph Chamberlain articulated its political identity as imperial in the late nineteenth century.’⁸³⁴ Chamberlain’s political hegemony over Birmingham made that association inextricable. Chamberlain was a proponent of New Imperialism, social imperialism, a British imperial *zollverein* and ‘Anglo-Saxon race imperialism.’⁸³⁵ Equally, ‘pride in Chamberlain as “Minister for Empire” made his position in Birmingham unassailable’⁸³⁶ and his earlier municipal socialism sustained the local myth by ‘which everything progressive was somehow traced to Chamberlain.’⁸³⁷ This combination

⁸³² Chief Constable of Birmingham to Major D.B. Dykes, 26.01.1944, BL/IOR/L/PJ/456.

⁸³³ Roger Ward, *City-state and nation: Birmingham’s Political History 1830-1940* (Stroud: Fonthill, 2015), 190.

⁸³⁴ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Oxford: Polity, 2002), 272.

⁸³⁵ Roger Ward, *Birmingham* 131.

⁸³⁶ *Ibid* 146.

⁸³⁷ *Ibid*, 147.

made Birmingham less vulnerable to attacks from the left and kept poorer working-class support for the Conservatives, while low unionisation helped keep Labour at bay. As Hall also notes, however, ‘the imagined map of the people and races of the empire was reworked’⁸³⁸ continuously in Birmingham. The city was also notable for its ‘lack of institutional regulation...its traditions of religious tolerations’ and its strong dissenting presence, ‘well established in Birmingham by the seventeenth century.’⁸³⁹ The First World War had fostered shop-steward militancy in the larger Birmingham factories while middle class exodus and massive working-class inward migration into munitions factories during the Second World War had brought a new politics and diluted the city’s Toryism, something that the India League could work with.⁸⁴⁰

A city that was *both* radical and imperial was already attractive to the antifascist left of the thirties: the China Campaign Committee had worked among the trades unions in Birmingham before the war, where part of the attraction was reclaiming the working class from the unnatural clutches of latter day Chamberlainism.⁸⁴¹ For the India League, it was only natural to extend this ambition to Chamberlain’s legatee, Amery. This began when the Communist Party, certain trades unions and local co-operative organisations responded to the failure of the Cripps Mission by ‘cooperating in an “Amery Must Go” campaign.’⁸⁴² This later expanded to include the local Labour Party, which agreed that Amery was ‘the man most responsible in Parliament for the Indian situation.’⁸⁴³ By 1942 the India League was aware that the CPGB was ready to ‘start up an Indian campaign’ in Birmingham. Menon himself was ‘particularly anxious to develop a big campaign in Birmingham because of Amery’s

⁸³⁸ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 276.

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁸⁴⁰ John Callaghan, ‘Ross McKibbin, Class cultures, the trades union and the Labour Party’, *Interpreting the Labour Party* eds. John Callaghan, Steven Fielding and Steve Ludlam (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 127.

⁸⁴¹ Arthur Clegg, *Aid China*, 26.

⁸⁴² See TNA/MI5/KV/2/1807,

⁸⁴³ *Times of India*, 28.1.1944.

associations with the city.⁸⁴⁴ At a meeting of shop stewards held in June 1942, ‘it was decided to organise ballots at different factories on support for India’⁸⁴⁵ with Menon particularly interested in Sparkbrook. This so alarmed Amery that he issued special instructions to find out ‘what is being done in his constituency’⁸⁴⁶ and Sorensen later ‘made much of the fact that Mr. L.S. Amery had been sent a telegram...from a meeting of his constituents expressing their absolute opposition to his Indian policy.’⁸⁴⁷ Amery remained a target throughout the war: In 1943, the India League singled out Sparkbrook as part of its ‘India Week’ celebration, which was being strongly supported by the CPGB and which had Sorensen and Dutt billed as speakers.⁸⁴⁸ At a 1944 delegate conference of the India League, Reginald Bridgeman demanded that the Secretary of State for India be fired.⁸⁴⁹

Amery was also the target of the IWA and its idiosyncratic repertoire of Indian anticolonial labourism. In 1943 Amery was addressing a meeting of the local constituency division of the Conservative Party, which was then invaded by some 250 people, including Indians, led by the leader of the IWA. ‘During question time, when there was a considerable amount of heckling, Indians among the audience unfurled a banner, bearing the words “Churchill and Amery are killing men, women and children.” A resolution was put to the meeting ‘amid cheers’ that demanded ‘the removal of Amery, the relief of the famine, and the re-opening of negotiations with the Indian leaders, also the release of political prisoners.’ A pamphlet was distributed by the IWA entitled *British Imperialism Starves Indian Masses*.⁸⁵⁰ Partha Chatterjee has noted the problem that subaltern histories ‘do not travel well’⁸⁵¹ out of their locality, but the IWA’s subaltern insurgency in Birmingham extricated subaltern labourist

⁸⁴⁴ Birmingham Regional Officer to MI5, 20.6.1942, TNA/MI5/KV2/2510.

⁸⁴⁵ ENSYR, 10.6.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/454.

⁸⁴⁶ IPI to Silver, 20.6.42, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/454.

⁸⁴⁷ ENSYR, 3.2.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁸⁴⁸ IPI to Silver, 6.1.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁸⁴⁹ ENSYR, 19.1.1944, BL/IOR/L/PJ/456.

⁸⁵⁰ ENSYR, 27.10.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁸⁵¹ Partha Chatterjee, ‘After Subaltern Studies’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47: 35 (2012), 44-49, 49.

anticolonial political agitational methods and vocabularies, namely the characteristic *gherao*, from its usual space: the street or the factory of the Indian colony and inserted it into the politest corner of British liberal politics: the local Conservative association. *Gherao* can be a verb. When labour *gheraos* management it is engaged in spatial transgression by leaving its appointed space, the factory floor, and entering the space reserved for managerial elites and in doing so impairing their ability to function. Sometimes a political or managerial leader's ability to move is restricted by a raucous but not violent crowd, thus confining *their* space. In this case, the local Conservative Party meeting, designed for local party members, was subject to a *gheraoing* by Indian labourers who successfully reduced its ability to function and claiming political space for the diaspora. This was not because of a dispute about labour conditions, but over empire. This subaltern insurgency abolished both imperial distance and hierarchy as it brought the *gherao* the closest it has ever come, physically, to the very apex of colonial political power: the Secretary of State for India. It also rejected the constitutional shibboleth that as a Minister, Amery's accountability was largely established through the collective responsibility of the Cabinet to Parliament, whereas to his geographic constituency he was principally accountable as an MP, let alone the fact that as Secretary of State for India, he was accountable to no Indians at all. Thus, through the insurgent re-imagining of these political meanings, the IWA attempted to use the locality of Sparkbrook to make an imperial official responsible for the catastrophes of colonial government, an insurgent assertion of accountability via the spatial insurgency of the Indian working-class diaspora.

Returning to Gilroy, this was the positing of an insurgent modernity which took the form of a vicarious spatial claim being made for the colony upon the formal political relationships that characterise occidental modernity. This was a provisional normalisation of the colonial relationship of dependency, expressed through a rejection of the differentiated and

inaccessible channels of accountability necessary to the maintenance of colonial authoritarianism in a liberal empire. What was offered in the place of these channels was an insurgent imagining of a specific form of autonomous political space: an anticolonial constituency at the heart of imperial Birmingham. This was not confined to the *gheraoing* of Amery, however, but became the basis of an electoral campaign. As the 1945 election loomed, the CPGB selected Rajani Palme Dutt to be their parliamentary candidate for Sparkbrook⁸⁵² against Amery, the ‘representative of diehard Tory Imperialism.’⁸⁵³ It must be noted that Dutt had some very unpleasant points: dutifully toeing the Moscow line on most questions, he would remain a lifelong apologist for Stalinism. Although an important and committed communist himself, Dutt’s scheme for India was far from revolutionary, however, calling simply for a ‘Government representative of the Indian People.’⁸⁵⁴ Dutt’s candidature was not without precedent: one of the CPGB’s most successful parliamentary representatives had been another Indian, Shapurji Saklatvala, though at a time when collaboration with Labour was easier. In this attempt to get an Indian elected and topple Amery, the CPGB used their big guns: Ben Bradley was the campaign’s general organiser, assisted by Eileen Palmer ‘whose work in the past has been mainly concerned with the India League’⁸⁵⁵ and Jimmy Shields, former editor of the *Daily Worker* and Britain’s former representative to Comintern. By 1945 Dutt had been elected Vice-President of the Birmingham branch of the India League,⁸⁵⁶ which issued circulars that requested that, in addition to ‘the large number of candidates (nearly 200)...associated with the League, donations be particularly given to Reginald Sorensen and Rajani Palme Dutt’⁸⁵⁷ to replace Leo Amery, whose ‘policy of deadlock has embittered India, solved no problems, created many more and is calculated to

⁸⁵² MI5, entry, 22.2.1944 in ‘Activities of Rajani Palme Dutt’ TNA/MI5/KV/2/1807.

⁸⁵³ *Daily Worker*, 26.5.1945.

⁸⁵⁴ Rajani Palme Dutt, *The Problem of India* (New York: International Publishers, 1943), 216.

⁸⁵⁵ Brigadier Sir David Petrie to W.C. Johnson, Chief Constable of Birmingham, 25.6.1945, TNA/MI5/KV/2/1807.

⁸⁵⁶ MI5, Extract from Report, 26.4.45, TNA/MI5/KV2/1807.

⁸⁵⁷ Menon to Ramchand, 15.6.1924, NMML/KMP/157.

strengthen anti-democratic forces both in Britain and India.⁸⁵⁸ While the CPGB produced a pamphlet, *Mr. Amery's Record*, which accused him of being responsible for the Bengal famine.⁸⁵⁹ Dutt insisted that he was not contesting the election 'solely on the issue of India' and while he was 'against Mr. Amery, one of the worst of the guilty men of Toryism on all issues, including India' his campaign was also about Birmingham because 'poverty in Sparkbrook and misrule in India are inter-related.'⁸⁶⁰ His campaign was for both 'full freedom for India and the establishment of an Indian national government' but also for 'democratic and social advance against monopoly and vested interests in Britain.'⁸⁶¹

During his campaign, Dutt attended IWA meetings, and sought their support.⁸⁶² It appears that the IWA kept up their disruptive tactics throughout the 1945 election as commentators noted afterwards that the campaign was characterised by 'political rowdyism.'⁸⁶³ The campaign produced a strong unity among the Indian diaspora: Amiya Bose's Committee of Indian Congressmen had relocated to Birmingham in 1944 to escape the Blitz and had links with the IWA.⁸⁶⁴ Although Bose was no fan of Menon and had Axis sympathies, he supported Dutt simply because 'he was an Indian.'⁸⁶⁵ The campaign also drew messages of encouragement from Nehru, Gandhi, Aung Sang and a letter from 'the 20,000 organised women of Andhra Province' who eagerly awaited Dutt's 'success over Amery' and appealed 'to our British sisters standing for Indo-British accord and Indian freedom'⁸⁶⁶ to vote for Dutt, an attractive appeal to the solidarities of gender over the boundaries of empire. The Sparkbrook election is particularly interesting because it was *anticolonial at both ends*: it

⁸⁵⁸ India League to Regional Branches, 6.6.1945, NMML/KMP/157.

⁸⁵⁹ *Times of India*, 25.6.1945.

⁸⁶⁰ *Times of India*, 25.6.1945.

⁸⁶¹ *Times of India*, 12.5.1944.

⁸⁶² MI5, extract from report, 28.6.1945, TNA/MI5/KV2/1807.

⁸⁶³ *Times of India*, 3.7.1945.

⁸⁶⁴ See BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/186.

⁸⁶⁵ *Times of India*, 25.6.1945.

⁸⁶⁶ See NMML/KMP/157.

mobilised an organised anticolonial diaspora (the IWA) and posited dangerously transnational solidarities against a symbol of British imperialism in a city and constituency that could serve as a synecdoche for empire. The obstacle remained, however, that while the Indian community, activists and far-flung well-wishers had coalesced around Dutt's candidature, the British left had not. The Birmingham India League had made an appeal for the Labour and Communist to agree on one 'progressive candidate' against Amery 'whose total eclipse in political life is desired by all Indians and progressive people in Sparkbrook.'⁸⁶⁷ Labour refused, with none other than George Bernard Shaw complaining that the Party had 'blundered badly' in putting up a candidate against Dutt as it meant that a 'vote for the Labour Party' would be a 'vote against India and a vote for imperialist capitalism through its most thoroughgoing prominent representative.'⁸⁶⁸ Dutt lost the 1945 election badly, even forfeiting his deposit, although he may have faced an uneven playing field: MI5 was keeping the local Birmingham police informed about the 'full attack on Amery'⁸⁶⁹ while the India Office sent the IBA into the field.

Amery insisted, even in defeat, that India had 'nothing to do with his loss.' Worse still, the Labour winner asserted that 'he knew nothing about India.' The usually staid *Times of India* noted, however, that 'it is significant that during the election campaign not a single question was asked at a public meeting about the Wavell plan and the prospect of the Simla Conference; much was heard of the Bengal famine, coupled with allegations of personal responsibility that Mr. Amery hotly denied.' The empire had lost control of the narrative as the political debate around the 1945 election hinged not on safe stories of liberal reform, but on radical anticolonial critiques. The *Times of India* concluded that the 'attack on Mr. Amery's Secretaryship of State won some votes for the Left Wing if not specifically for the

⁸⁶⁷ *Times of India*, 25.6.1945.

⁸⁶⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 30.6.1945.

⁸⁶⁹ Brigadier Sir David Petrie to W.C. Johnson, Chief Constable of Birmingham, 25.6.1945 and 13.6.1945, TNA/MI5/KV/2/1807.

Communist Party.⁸⁷⁰ The Government of India noted how Amery's defeat was met with 'jubilation'⁸⁷¹ in Congress circles. The Labour winner, Alderman Percy Shurmer, then joined the parliamentary committee of the India League⁸⁷² and even lent his name to an open letter from the India League calling for Indian independence through a Constituent Assembly.⁸⁷³ Thus, while the Chief Constable of Birmingham might wring his hands about the 'extensive Indian colony'⁸⁷⁴ in his city, the insurgent re-imaginary of Sparkbrook that was preserved was the opposite: an anti-colony, or at the very least an anticolonial constituency within the city of Chamberlain, Amery and empire.

The Raj Comes Home: IPI's Colonial Disciplining of the British Indian Diaspora

Member of the IWA would comment on the conspicuous police presence at their meetings,⁸⁷⁵ though they could not be aware of the extent of their surveillance and securitisation because it happened in secret, by IPI. Stephen Legg defined colonialism as 'practices within colonies'⁸⁷⁶ whereas Ann Laura Stoler describes a colony as a 'physical and social location of a specific aggregated population, a place' but also a 'set of trained dispositions' and 'not least a requisite set of embodied and durable racialized relations.'⁸⁷⁷ IPI's activities strongly resemble the dispositions and racialized tensions of colonialism and its associated practices, even as it occurred outside of the physical location of the colony.

IPI's origins can be traced to the fear that the ethnographic expertise available as a resource of government in India was unavailable in Britain to make sense of, and thereby discipline,

⁸⁷⁰ *Times of India*, 27.7.1945.

⁸⁷¹ Information and Broadcasting Department of the Government of India to Secretary of State, 1.8.1945, TP 11, 1

⁸⁷² NMML/KMP/191.

⁸⁷³ Mr. Dobbie and Others to Newspaper Editors, 6.9.1945, TP 11, 220.

⁸⁷⁴ unsigned (likely IPI) to Silver, 2.4.1941, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁸⁷⁵ IPI to Silver, 9.2.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁸⁷⁶ Stephen Legg, 'Decolonialism' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42:3 (2017), 345-348, 347.

⁸⁷⁷ Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colony' *Political Contexts: A Critical Lexicon*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 46.

the Indian diaspora. In 1908 the Secretary of State, Lord Morley wrote to the Viceroy that ‘experts from the Home Office and Scotland Yard pointed out that their men are wholly useless in the case of Indian conspirators. They have no sort of agency to distinguish Hindu from Mahomedan, or Verma from Varma. The whole Indian field is absolutely unfamiliar, in language, habits, and everything else.’⁸⁷⁸ IPI was always a former Indian Police Service officer, bringing with him the culture of that organisation, its ethnographic expertise but also a ‘proper’ understanding of the native and how to deal with him. One of the preferred candidates for the office of IPI was Charles Tegart, a veteran of British operations during the Irish War of Independence and notorious in Calcutta as a brutal torturer.⁸⁷⁹ Tegart was widely viewed by the British, however, as a successful counterinsurgency policeman and his choice indicated the importance of IPI within the wider imperial security architecture.

IPI had no statutory basis in any formal act of Parliament or of the Government of India. It was provisionally established as early as 1909 (the same year as the Secret Service Bureau, the forerunner to both MI5 and MI6) simply through the transfer of John Wallinger from the Indian Police Service to the India Office in London. This was largely in response to the formation of India House and an Indian revolutionary cell in Paris under Sarat Chandra Bose and Bhikaiji Cama, which had disturbing connections to Maud Gonne and her world of Irish radical nationalism.⁸⁸⁰ As Kate O’Malley points out, the targets of surveillance was ‘actions of communist or Bolshevik suspects’ though non-communist members of the League Against Imperialism were targeted.⁸⁸¹ IPI preferred to justify its founding by reference to terrorism, citing the ‘wave of violent crime’ during Lord Minto’s Viceroyalty, especially the murder of

⁸⁷⁸ Cited in Richard Poplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire* (London: Routledge, 1995), 129.

⁸⁷⁹ Kate O’Malley, ‘Indian Political Intelligence: The Monitoring of Real and Possible Danger’ *Intelligence, Statecraft and International Power: Papers Read Before the 27th Conference of Irish Historians Held At Trinity College, Dublin 19-21 May 2005*, eds. Jane Ohlmeyer, Robert Armstrong and Eunan O’Halpin (Dublin and Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2006), 180.

⁸⁸⁰ Kate O, Malley, ‘Indian Political Intelligence,’ 177.

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid*, 175-176.

Sir Curzon Wylie in Britain in 1909.⁸⁸² IPI was, nevertheless, an essentially *responsive* organisation in that it was established, grew and moved its global network in response to the migration and agency of anticolonial transnational activists. Hence ‘during the 1914-1918 war it became necessary for this officer to arrange for surveillance in the USA of the activities of fanatical anti-British Sikhs [The *Ghadar* Party] and for assistance to US authorities in bringing some of these persons to trial for war-time offences.’⁸⁸³ In the post-war period, the very question of the post becoming permanent depended ‘completely upon the continued existence of conspiracies and propaganda which it is necessary to watch.’⁸⁸⁴ In 1921 the Government of India refused to keep funding IPI, forcing the Secretary of State to fund it out of his own grant from India⁸⁸⁵ and by 1926 IPI was reduced to a single officer without a deputy and ‘4 or 5 female clerks.’⁸⁸⁶ IPI expanded again, in line with the growth of the Indian National Congress, and maintained a transnational colonial network throughout North America and the continent of Europe, with offices at Paris and Geneva. Its leader, serving from 1926 until the end of the war, was John Vickery, who had already served in London, Canada and the USA before taking over as IPI.⁸⁸⁷ By the war it was being funded by India again, through the Delhi Intelligence Bureau (DIB): its budget in 1938 stood at 12,000 rupees, rising to Rs.15,000 by the end of the war,⁸⁸⁸ an unknown part of the ‘Home Charges’ – the ‘sums that Indians paid Britain to rule over them’⁸⁸⁹ that had so exercised Naoroji. In 1939 IPI spent £500 on subsidising New Scotland Yard, £5500 on European operations and £1500 in the USA. The total expenditure on ‘secret services’ in 1939 was £8,669, all remitted from India through opaque accounting methods to avoid alerting an Indian clerk.⁸⁹⁰ As an

⁸⁸² IPI to Croft and Monteath, 21.11.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/662.

⁸⁸³ IPI to Croft and Monteath, 21.11.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662.

⁸⁸⁴ J.W. Hose to H.L. Stephenson, 23.6.1929, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/39.

⁸⁸⁵ W. Johnston to Peel, 4.6.36, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/781.

⁸⁸⁶ Hirtzel to Vickery, 3.7.1926, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/39.

⁸⁸⁷ Vickery to Percy Patrick, 30.6.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/662.

⁸⁸⁸ See BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/781.

⁸⁸⁹ Joya Chatterji, *Shadows at Noon*, 16.

⁸⁹⁰ Various Correspondences in BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/781.

organisation paid for by India but operating in Britain, a 'privilege not enjoyed by any empire intelligence organisation,'⁸⁹¹ IPI had a uniquely imperial structure in that, in addition to its global reach, it served 'not only as the DIB's representative in this country [Britain]' but also functioned as 'as the Indian section of the Security Service'⁸⁹² and worked extremely closely with MI5, with which it shared premises and a shared inheritance of colonial policing and surveillance: the wartime director of MI5 was Sir David Petrie, a veteran of DIB and diligent chaser after Indian leftists such as M.N. Roy. IPI also passed intelligence to SIS/MI6 in exchange for information, usually about 'political movements in the countries adjoining India.'⁸⁹³ An 'integral part of the Commonwealth Security Intelligence system,' IPI also worked closely with India Office, Burma Office, Foreign Office, Passport Office, Colonial Office, Home Office, War Office and Admiralty' In Britain it collaborated heavily with the Special Branch of Scotland Yard.⁸⁹⁴ While it was coordinated by DIB, IPI's existence meant that London, and not the colony, was the location for a global clearing-house for intelligence material on anticolonial Indians abroad.⁸⁹⁵

IPI was therefore a global intelligence network in defence of empire, but it could also be an extrusion of the colonial governmentality of India that necessarily travelled out along the boundaries of race. This is because the criteria for surveillance of colonial subjects outside of colonial space must necessarily must be defined racially: far fewer Europeans were the subject of IPI surveillance or collation, and the bar for monitoring them was much higher.⁸⁹⁶

IPI's secret, global, operations further render impossible our ability to establish a stable boundary between colonial and non-colonial space while following the contradictory logic, as outlined by Winston James, 'which told them [colonial subjects] that they were British, and

⁸⁹¹ IPI to Miss Hanchett, 29.11.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662.

⁸⁹² IPI to Gibson, 27.2.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662.

⁸⁹³ IPI to Croft and Monteath, 21.11.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662.

⁸⁹⁴ IPI to Miss Hanchett, 29.11.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662.

⁸⁹⁵ Kate O' Malley, 'Indian Political Intelligence,' 177.

⁸⁹⁶ Kate O'Malley 'Indian Political Intelligence,' 181.

the logic of the métropole, which persistently and often violently told them they were not.⁸⁹⁷ We can demonstrate this by examining IPI's use of what Bernard Cohn once described as an 'investigative modality:' the creation of colonial knowledge through the surveillance of dangerously mobile groups by 'special investigations to provide the criteria by which whole groups could be stigmatized as criminal.'⁸⁹⁸ This was particularly acute with regards to the IWA. In 1941 the Chief Constable of Birmingham was 'feeling apprehensive about the extensive Indian colony engaged mainly in industrial work in his area'⁸⁹⁹ and was recommending mass incarceration. IPI demurred, but MI5 was equally insistent⁹⁰⁰ and so six members of the IWA were placed on the 'list of persons earmarked for internment in case of an invasion' despite officials conceding that they did not meet the minimum requirement of demonstrable 'enemy associations.'⁹⁰¹ The case against the IWA was made based on detailed dossiers collated by IPI on speeches and existing plans made by the Midlands Regional Commissioner to arrest 'suspected Irishmen' in case of an invasion⁹⁰² Just as the IWA represents an example of 'subaltern history' travelling, IPI provides an example of the mobility of what Ranajit Guha famously described as the 'prose of counter-insurgency,'⁹⁰³ a thick tissue of securitising characterisations premised on native deficiencies of volatility and violence: IPI described the IWA as a 'terrorist or semi-terrorist organisation'⁹⁰⁴ even though there was 'no serious threat to the general security of this country.' IPI's prose also exhibits what Stoler describes as the 'protective architecture and anticipatory fear'⁹⁰⁵ of colonialism. The anticipatory fear echoed the pre-1857 paranoias of subversive influence spreading, though in this case it was not to regiments of Sepoys near Meerut, but to 'other industrial

⁸⁹⁷ Cited in Sean Hawkins and Phillip D. Morgan 'Blacks and the British Empire: An Introduction', *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Black Experience and the Empire* eds. Phillip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

⁸⁹⁸ Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, 10.

⁸⁹⁹ Unsigned, likely IPI to Silver, 2.4.1941, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁹⁰⁰ Unsigned, likely IPI to Silver, 2.4.1941, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁹⁰¹ G.J. Morley to Gibson, Patrick, Monteath, and Clauson, 4.4.42 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁹⁰² IPI to Silver, 2.4.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁹⁰³ Ranajit Guha 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency' *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* eds. Nicholas Dirks Geoff Ely and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

⁹⁰⁴ IPI to Miss Hanchett, 29.11.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁹⁰⁵ Ann Laura Stoler 'Colony,' 48.

centres' in the West Midlands and from small meetings of largely Punjabis to 'Hindus, Sikhs and Muhammedans alike.' The idea of subversive influence overcoming this *difference*; Hindus, Sikhs and Muhammedans is nothing less than the fear of pan-Indianism: of India's natural divisions being overcome in the production of a common identity that might threaten the *Raj*, even in Birmingham.

In justifying surveillance IPI invoked the anticipatory fear that 'there is however always the possibility that incitement to violence may induce some deluded Indian to commit an outrage or attempt the life of some-one prominent in English life.'⁹⁰⁶ This chimed with IPI's wider view that IWA speeches worked because they were designed to operate on the 'emotions of the impressionable and the ignorant.'⁹⁰⁷ In Birmingham as much as in Mardan, therefore, 'native' deficiencies were the justification for exceptional methods. The India Office's initial strategy had begun gently: establishing clubs in the Midlands to keep Indians away from radical associations.⁹⁰⁸ Later, IPI's strategy became more colonial: 'disaffected and troublesome Indians' were best dealt with by 'making an example the leading figures.'⁹⁰⁹ In an echo of the colonial construction of martial races, the Sikh members of IWA were particularly feared and singled out.⁹¹⁰ IPI then embarked on the construction of colonial 'protective architecture' by arranging conferences on the IWA with 'Regional Security and Police Officers from Birmingham, Bradford, Coventry and Wolverhampton.'⁹¹¹ IPI lamented that the British government lacked the power to compel Indians to return to India and so resolved to 'so direct their lives that they will...want to go back.'⁹¹² Simone Brown describes this strategy as 'racialising surveillance,' a 'technology of social control where surveillance

⁹⁰⁶ IPI to Silver, 24.2.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁹⁰⁷ IPI to Silver, 15.4.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/645.

⁹⁰⁸ Rehana Ahmed 'Networks of Resistance', 95.

⁹⁰⁹ Unsigned, likely IPI to Silver, 2.4.1941, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁹¹⁰ IPI to Silver, 2.4.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/645.

⁹¹¹ IPI to Silver, 24.2.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁹¹² IPI to Silver, 9.1.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

practices, policies and performances concern the production of norms pertaining to race and exercise a “power to define what is in or out of place.”⁹¹³

IPI followed the colonial method of criminalising political dissent, but in ways that reflected the IWA’s working-class status in Britain. IPI leaned on the Ministry of National Service to order IWA members to take up war work in ‘certain factories’ with the hope that they would not comply and thereby be open to prosecution. Such individuals were carefully selected with the intent of robbing the IWA of ‘effective leadership.’⁹¹⁴ This, in turn, recalls the use of Section 110 of the Indian Criminal Procedure Code where an innocent person but with a ‘bad reputation’ (usually an annoying agitator) could be required to submit a surety for good behaviour which they could not afford and be promptly imprisoned without the rigmarole of the courts. Similarly, none of the IWA members singled out were guilty, juridically, of a crime under British law. Even if they had made intemperate speeches they were not singled for those speeches, but because of their subversive anticolonial leadership. IPI’s moves were the beginnings of a wider policy: Churchill’s government was considering ‘a measure for deporting the many hundred Indian seamen deserters in this country’ – a reduction of the plurality of the Indian diaspora to something resembling the colonial category of a criminal tribe. The intention was clearly political: Amery confided to his diary that ‘I shall not regret their departure’ as they ‘are mostly in the Midlands as black marketeers, pedlars etc. and are organised by the India League to interrupt my meetings.’⁹¹⁵ Thanks to the 1945 election, nothing came of this.

⁹¹³ Simone Brown, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 16.

⁹¹⁴ IPI to Silver, 9.1.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁹¹⁵ Leopold Amery, diary entry, 4.8.1944, Leopold Amery, *The Empire At Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries* ed. John Barnes and David Nicholson (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1988), 992 (hereafter, *Amery Diary*).

The IWA unwittingly evaded and resisted IPI in ways that recall the challenges of colonial securitisation, including the classic problem of unreliable ‘native’ informants. In a passage that could have been lifted straight out of colonial policing, IPI admitted the ‘special difficulties in securing accurate reports regarding utterances in the vernacular.’ IPI’s informant was an Indian who ‘was himself present but probably memorised only the more outstanding features and the most daring remarks.’ The result was a nebulous suspiciousness of ‘seditious talk which only Indians themselves could understand and which therefore carried with it little risk of official action.’⁹¹⁶ IPI was clearly frustrated by his reliance on ‘the memories of informants’ for access to ‘vernacular speeches.’⁹¹⁷ The protective power offered by Indian languages, a kind of anti-surveillance shield, was not lost on Fred Longden, a local Labour MP and conscientious objector who spoke at an IWA meeting. Longden noted how accounts of his speeches tended to reach the authorities and cause him difficulties. Noting the ‘presence of police’ at a joint India League-IWA meeting he ‘regretted that he was unable to speak Hindustani like the previous speakers’⁹¹⁸ as that might have afforded him some protection from the state.

The wartime IPI represents, therefore, the secret translation of the *Raj* to Britain, ensuring that Indians, here defined as a race because they could no longer be defined by their occupation of a particular colonial space, encountered colonialism in Britain as much as in India. This speaks to the ongoing (and perhaps stale) debate over what Burton calls ‘the persistent conviction that home and empire were separate spheres.’⁹¹⁹ While these debates often focus on society and culture, IPI is something quite different: the translation to ‘home’ of imperial prejudices, assumptions and practices that we could, as a term of convenience,

⁹¹⁶ IPI to Silver, 10.2.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁹¹⁷ IPI to Silver, 24.2.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁹¹⁸ IPI to Silver, 24.2.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/645.

⁹¹⁹ Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of Empire: Indians and the colonial encounter in late-Victorian Britain* (University of California Press, 2020 ed.), 8.

bundle together as a colonial governmentality. This serves as a broader reminder that, for all that the empire connected and globalised, whether through railways, port cities, liberalism or telegraph lines, it remained ultimately a structure of formalised difference, hierarchy and othering. IPI and the police's attempts to turn the members of the IWA back into colonial subjects provides a confirmation of Cesaire and Arendt's instinct that there were 'boomerang effects'⁹²⁰ of imperialism, even within robustly liberal Britain and confirming Edmund Burke's venerable fear, albeit in a very different way to that imagined by him, that 'autocracy abroad...corrupted liberty at home.'⁹²¹

Menon and the Strange End of Indian Political Intelligence

Race does not exist unmediated by other identities and while IPI felt that he had a free hand with the working-class members of the IWA, when it attempted to transform Menon into a political prisoner it found that his elite status and political connections made that impossible. Notwithstanding his connections with the CPGB, Menon was a model citizen of Britain. He was a local Councillor and Chairman of the Library Committee of St. Pancras: introducing travelling Libraries and children's reading nooks. He played his part in defending British liberalism from appeasement by campaigning to keep the German Nazi Party and the British Union of Fascists from marching through his part of London, helped found Pelican and Penguin publishers, and risked his life for the British as an Air Raid Warden during the Blitz. This was recognised by his appointment as a Freeman of St. Pancras, the second person to receive this honour after George Bernard Shaw. The secret state, however, led by IPI, tried everything in their power to de-citizen him, remove him from the political space of Britain and thereby recolonise him. The impetus came from the Viceroy, who told Amery that publications in the British press by the India League about reopening negotiations with the

⁹²⁰ Aimé Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 36 and Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 223.

⁹²¹ Robert Young, *Empire, Colony, Postcolony*, (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 88.

Congress was having an impact on the morale of his governors.⁹²² He was particularly annoyed by Lord Farringdon and even suggested that speeches on India in parliament be prevented from reaching the subcontinent,⁹²³ further evidence of the importance of agnotology to 'liberal' imperialism. The Viceroy was clearly frustrated by the unavailability of colonial methods to deal with Menon in Britain:

I would ask again (I have often bothered you about him) whether it is not possible to do something to impede his freedom of action. You have a good deal of material about him, and if there were any way in which we could bring him under a little closer control of whatever type, I do think there would be a great deal to be said for it. He, and his little group of somewhat malcontent people in the Commons, like Sorensen, give rise to quite a disproportionate amount of difficulty out here⁹²⁴

More directly, Linlithgow suggested that 'we should take pains to break up Menon and break up the India League with him.'⁹²⁵ Linlithgow complained that 'Krishna Menon and his organisation have constantly misrepresented the Indian problem before the Press and public at home, and have consistently intrigued to create in Parliament and the constituencies prejudice against our Indian policy...I do hope you will seriously consider the expediency of seizing some favourable occasion to get him put out of the U.K.'⁹²⁶ The moving-around of rebellious colonial subjects had a long history: Governor John Eyre had George William Gordon, a Jamaican-British member of the House of Assembly of colonial Jamaica transported from Kingston, where martial law was not in place, to Morant Bay, where it was, so that he could be executed by the colonial state without due process of law. Vinayak

⁹²² Linlithgow to Amery, 27.8.1942, TP 2, 829.

⁹²³ Linlithgow to Amery, 7.2.1942, TP 1, 128.

⁹²⁴ Linlithgow to Amery, 23.6.1942 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

⁹²⁵ Linlithgow to Amery, 30.11.1942, TP 3, 325.

⁹²⁶ Linlithgow to Amery, 31.3.1942, TP 1, 592.

Damodar Savarkar had been extradited to India in order that he might receive a harsher sentence under Indian law than he would have had in Britain: once again, the empire aspired to enforce itself at home using the tools of colonialism.

Amery also received a complaint from a Conservative MP who felt the League should be ‘suppressed’ and that Menon ‘should not be allowed to retain his liberty.’⁹²⁷ Amery’s reply expressed a longing to do as he asked, but noted that he was ‘very clever and takes good care, at any rate in anything he says in English, to keep sufficiently within the law to make it difficult to intern him...Anyhow, between ourselves, we are watching him carefully.’⁹²⁸ Menon had had a ‘Home Office Warrant’ on him for years, MI5 had been tapping the League’s phone since 1932 at the request of the India Office⁹²⁹ and now they were having Menon ‘tailed’⁹³⁰ and tapping his private phone,⁹³¹ hoping no doubt to trip him up by construing his statements as seditious. In achieving this, the Second World War had both deepened security paranoias over anticolonial activity but also provided new vocabularies and means for Menon’s arrest: By 1943 IPI was actively seeking his internment under the Defence Regulations by describing his work as being against the successful prosecution of the war. It was not possible, however, to successfully pursue this because Menon ‘can always count on the support not only of a half a dozen or so MPs and of numerous persons of position and influence in various walks of life.’ IPI was successful, however, in its attempts to ‘restrict Menon’s supply of Paper’ which hurt the output of the League newspaper, *Newsindia*. IPI then began ‘endeavouring to have Menon called-up for National Service,’⁹³² actively supported by Roger Hollis of MI5’s countersubversion division.⁹³³ Menon was able

⁹²⁷ David Robertson MP to Amery, 10.11.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

⁹²⁸ Amery to David Robertson MP, 12.11.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323 Amery was mistaken as Menon spoke none of his own Malayalam, let alone Hindustani.

⁹²⁹ See TNA/MI5/KV/2/2509.

⁹³⁰ Minute from IPI to ‘B.4a’ (MI5), 7.1.1941. TNA/MI5/KV/2/2509.

⁹³¹ IPI to Mr Hollis, 14.4.1941, TNA/MI5/KV/2/2509.

⁹³² IPI to Mr. Silver, 1.2.1943 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁹³³ IPI to F.2.a/Richard Hollis, 26.12.41, TNA/MI5/KV/2/2510.

to get a medical certificate, however, from an India League member and financier, Dr. Bhandari, that precluded him from service and, as a practicing barrister, he held a reserved occupation. The Ministry of Labour did accede, however, in nobbling an India League activist who was less well-connected: Rewel Singh was ‘ordered to work on the land,’⁹³⁴ a very colonial punishment for anticolonial activity in Britain.

IPI justified its very existence by the need to monitor anticolonial organisations, especially the India League.⁹³⁵ Thus, IPI and the India League cannot be understood without each other.

There is every evidence that IPI had a spy in the innermost circle of the India League, who knew everything that Menon, for example, did, planned or felt in exquisite detail, and over many years, but there appears to be no way of deducing who it was. The relationship of power was not always in one direction, however: The India League had already been ‘trying to secure evidence to show that the India-Burma Association is an “India Office organisation”⁹³⁶ indicating that they knew the colonial state was active in British politics.

Remarkably, S.A. Dange, in a public speech for the India League, stated that; ‘the suppression of news and the widespread ignorance of conditions in India had given rise to a sharp divergence of opinion among progressive British elements, and this divergence was widened by the existence of a secret agency in this country, financed by the Government of India.’⁹³⁷

Unwittingly, the India League had the last laugh. India’s transformation into a nation state involved the appointment of High Commissioner chosen not by London, but by Delhi, as was normal practice among states. Nehru chose Menon as a reward for his work with the India

⁹³⁴ IPI to Mr. Silver, 1.2.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁹³⁵ Kate O’Malley, ‘Indian Political Intelligence,’ 183.

⁹³⁶ IPI to Silver, 10.9.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

⁹³⁷ ENSYR, 22.11.1944, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

League, and this appointment helped destroy IPI. IPI was always vulnerable to liberal reforms in India. After the 1935 Act was passed IPI was worried that his subsidy from the would be noticed by a 'politically-minded clerk in the accounts in India' who might leak that information to the 'League Against Imperialism, India League or National Council of Civil Liberties,' all of which could launch a 'distinctly unpleasant attack on government'⁹³⁸ and a series of manoeuvres were made to keep the accounts out of Indian hands. The liberal threat to IPI was increased by the formation of the interim government in 1946. This meant that the imperial character of DIB, IPI's sponsor, lapsed. As he was now 'regarded solely as a servant of an Indian government' he warned the British security services against sharing information with him that he 'was not permitted to disclose to the Government of India.'⁹³⁹ Surprisingly, IPI continued although the officer was now fearful that the loss of Indian funding would mean that the Treasury would wind up his organisation as an independence concern. IPI was therefore 'strongly of the opinion that the new Home Member should at least be given the chance of opting for the continuance of the status quo, that is to retain a section of the DIB's staff working subject to his orders in the United Kingdom, with its own contacts abroad in full collaboration with the United Kingdom security services.' Inevitably, 'India should be asked to pay.'⁹⁴⁰ DIB duly met with Vallabhai Patel who agreed in principle to the continuation of IPI though 'care should be taken that nothing to the prejudice of India's interests is passed from this organisation to the British authorities.' Patel felt that the monitoring of the Congress Socialist Party and the Forward Bloc should cease'⁹⁴¹ and while he ordered the discontinuing of intelligence gathering on 'orthodox Congress and Muslim League activity' he gave no instructions about limiting IPI's targets outside of India. DIB therefore held hope for IPI on account of Vallabhai Patel being 'rabidly-anti-communist' and

⁹³⁸ W. Johnson to Peel, 4.6.1935, BL/IOR/L/781.

⁹³⁹ IPI to Miss Hanchett, 29.11.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662.

⁹⁴⁰ PJ Patrick to W.D. Croft, 20.3.1946 BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662.

⁹⁴¹ IPI to Turnbull and PJ Patrick 25.9.1946 BL/IOR/L/PJ/662.

being ‘fully aware of the importance of keeping a very close eye on Communist activities and the potentially subversive tendencies of extreme left-wingers in general.’ This would be facilitated by a ‘give or take’ relationship where Britain would get from India information about communism, Russian and Chinese espionage and penetration, the Kuomintang, the Chinese relationship with Tibet and information from Afghanistan and Eastern Persia. This was because ‘Britain will have interests in India for a very long time necessitating a close watch by HMG on external threats to the peace and security of India.’ In 1946 IPI was the subject of a ‘Conference held at the India Office’⁹⁴² which included DIB, the heads of MI5 and MI6, the two senior-most civil servants at the India Office but, unsurprisingly, no Labour ministers. Much seemed to depend on whether India remained in the Commonwealth but neither anti-communism nor the Commonwealth was able to soak up the contradictions generated by an imperial intelligence agency transforming into one shared by two nation-states. This was an issue clarified by the inescapable role of race in the administration of empire: Britain’s Services were reluctant to ‘accept an Indianised personnel in substitution of European British officers’ in DIB nor a ‘an Indian Politician in charge of the Home-Department.’⁹⁴³ Hope was held out, however, that there would be an exchange of liaison officers, ‘particularly if the Indian liaison officer in London were himself a European.’⁹⁴⁴

There was another obstacle, however: Menon. Nehru’s interim Government had appointed him ‘as their special representative in order to conduct informal conversations with governments of other countries in Western Europe on the subject of exchange of diplomatic relations.’⁹⁴⁵ IPI was now clearly in a bind because its mission and target were now hopelessly contradictory as its key surveillance area of ‘anti-British activities’ were now

⁹⁴² IPI to Miss Hanchett, 29.11.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/662.

⁹⁴³ P.J. Patrick to W.D. Croft, 20.3.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662.

⁹⁴⁴ IPI to Miss Hanchett, 29.11.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/662.

⁹⁴⁵ Government of India to Secretary of State for India, 28.11.1945, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662.

conducted by ‘professed supporters of the interim government’ of which IPI was *technically a servant*. This included ‘the well-known Krishna Menon, Secretary of the India League here who has been taken by Mr. Nehru into quasi-diplomatic employment’ and so, in order to ‘avoid embarrassment’ intelligence about Menon could no longer be ‘be passed on to India.’⁹⁴⁶ This blocked one end of IPI’s imperial intelligence pipe and undermined its *raison d’etre*. By July 1946 IPI was aware that Menon was expecting a ‘lucrative post with the Indian government, possibly in England, as a reward for his services with the India League.’⁹⁴⁷ It became apparent that if Menon was appointed High Commissioner for India in London, he and IPI itself would both be servants of the new Government of India.⁹⁴⁸ MI5’s Director-General, Sir Percy Sillitoe attempted, through IPI and Britain’s powerful Joint Intelligence Committee, to pressure Nehru, Westminster and the new Director of DIB, Raobahadur T.G. Sanjeevi to keep Menon from India House.⁹⁴⁹ He was seemingly ignored by both Attlee and Nehru. Arrangements were therefore made to shut down IPI on the 1st of August 1947, two weeks before the day of Indian independence. The day itself, however, did not mark a major change in the intelligence structure: the last British DIB had surrendered his office to Sanjeevi earlier that year⁹⁵⁰ and the Home portfolio had already been taken over by Patel as part of the interim government. Patel was open to the organisation continuing and was certainly strong enough to override Nehru’s objections to an organisation within his own Ministerial remit. Patel was also singularly concerned with preserving and enhancing the security apparatus of the *Raj*. Organisations under him tended to show continuity, rather than rupture, with the immediately colonial past.⁹⁵¹ Indian Independence Day was, however, the day that Menon took over as High Commissioner. It is hard to envision an arrangement where

⁹⁴⁶ IPI to Croft and Montearth, 21.11.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662.

⁹⁴⁷ ENSYR, 3.7.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

⁹⁴⁸ P.J. Patrick to Neville Butler, 29.11.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662.

⁹⁴⁹ See TNA/MI5/KV/2/2512-20.

⁹⁵⁰ DIB to Secretary of State for India and IPI, 5.4.1947, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662 and Home Department, Government of India, to Secretary of State for India, 15.7.1947, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662.

⁹⁵¹ Corbridge and Harriss, *Reinventing India*, 45.

IPI could have continued its independent, India-funded and imperial intelligence structure without one of the principal subjects of its decades-long surveillance program, Menon, exercising some form of supervisory function from India House. IPI held that for ‘as long as Menon and his associates remained in the High Commissioner’s office, there could be no reasonable guarantee of security as far as India is concerned.’⁹⁵² IPI disappeared into SIS and eventually became ‘OS4.’⁹⁵³ Given Britain’s desire to maintain close intelligence links with its former colony, IPI’s forced dissolution must have been a bitter blow. From inside SIS, Vickery promptly started briefing about Menon’s ‘present communist activities’ even though they had substantially ceased. His report was emotional and unprofessional, perhaps acknowledging his defeat by the new High Commissioner, whining that ‘Menon is clearly dishonest, immoral, an opportunist and an intriguer.’ The campaign began to get rid of him and place the High Commission under surveillance. In doing so, IPI penetrated into Menon’s private life and shared it with the intelligence community, noting that his romantic relations with Bridget Tunnard was of ‘considerable importance’ as she was ‘at least a fellow traveller.’⁹⁵⁴ The paranoid fear that India House was employing communists led to the belief that ‘any documents passed there might be compromised.’⁹⁵⁵ The Commonwealth Relations Office was therefore desperate to get rid of Menon and so the British High Commissioner in India duly passed an incriminating dossier to the Indian Minister for Home Affairs.⁹⁵⁶ MI5 files include investigations into Menon’s business arrangements which suggests, though not entirely conclusively, that MI5 may have helped bring to light the notorious ‘jeep scandal’ that nearly put paid to Menon’s career.⁹⁵⁷ Paul McGarr has detailed the extraordinary lengths the security services took to get rid of Menon as High Commissioner⁹⁵⁸ but it is important to

⁹⁵² IPI to ‘DDG’, 18.6.1949, TNA/MI5/KV2/2512.

⁹⁵³ P.C. Bamford to Miss Hanchett, 30.12.1949, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662.

⁹⁵⁴ IPI, note re the India League and V.K. Krishna Menon, 30.5.1949, TNA/MI5/KV2/2512.

⁹⁵⁵ IPI, note Re question of Top Secret Categories going to High Commissioner for India, 15.6.1949, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662.

⁹⁵⁶ OS4, Minute Sheet, 28.6.1951, TNA/MI5/KV2/2512.

⁹⁵⁷ See TNA/MI5/KV2/2512.

⁹⁵⁸ Paul McGarr “A Serious Menace to Security:” *British Intelligence, V.K. Krishna Menon and the Indian High Commission in London, 1947-52*, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 38: 3, 441-469

note that they failed: Menon represented India at India House and at the United Nations for years.

IPI was an organisation responsible for extending the colonial governmentalities of British India out of strictly colonial space to Britain, and whose very existence would have extended imperial relations of dependence past the midnight hour. Thus, India's arrival at a position of formal political modernity – a nation-state able to select its own diplomatic representatives represented by Menon's translation from unofficial to official representative of India – helped erase the colonial space within Britain created by IPI's imperial structure and secret deployment of colonial governmentalities.

The members and allies of the India League negotiated and produced diverse ways of being Indian outside of India in subversively anticolonial terms that posited insurgent modernities and accountabilities for the colony in an ostensibly liberal empire. In doing so, new spatialities were created: the projection of the anticolonial Indian womanhood deep into America, involving the conquering of spaces that were closed to women in both imperial, national and universal imaginaries, as well as the insurgent postulation of an anticolonial constituency in the imperial locality of Birmingham. As the anticolonial diaspora sought to overthrow empire through this symbolic and political repertoire, however, the empire struck back in ways that sought to recolonise the ex-colonised subjects, both legally and ideologically, as IPI sought to return the workers of the IWA to the colony or denigrating the threatening figure of Indian womanhood as sexually deviant. In the end, the insurgent modernities won out in defiance of imperialism, the culmination of which was India's translation to the modernity of nationhood and Menon's position from unofficial

representative of a colony to official representative of a nation, which helped erase colonialism not just in India, but in Britain as well.

IV.

The India League and the Anticolonial Idea of a Constituent Assembly:

Making the Independence (and Partition) of India 1932-1947

The first chapter demonstrated the ways in which the India League's network gave it influence within the Labour Party. This chapter builds upon this to argue that the India

League helped shape Indian independence through its anticolonial idea – a Constituent Assembly for India – that it successfully transmitted through that network as well as its contacts in India until it became both a key Congress demand and the very policy by which the Labour Party sought to realise Indian independence. The Constituent Assembly idea was the most comprehensive and consequential of the normalising modernities advanced by the India League. It became the inaugural site of India's postcolonial modernity as a state, expressed through a rational, liberal, (fairly) representative and inescapably *Indian* institution. This produced a constitution which exhibited that same combination of qualities that ideologues of empire deemed to be an impossibility.

The Assembly was also largely unprecedented within the British Empire where constitution-making had largely taken the form of imperial conferences codified by Statutes of Westminster that recognised, even as they might have superseded, the imperial parliament. Conceived amidst the labyrinthine Round Table Conferences (RTC), the Constituent Assembly idea represented five anticolonial departures from their structure and composition. Firstly, constitutional progress through a Constituent Assembly would not be conditional on communal agreement or the support of loyalist princes. Secondly, the input of British politicians and colonial officials was firmly ejected and the role of the imperial parliament reduced to ratification. Thirdly, this relocated the *site* of constitution-making from Britain to India which thereby replaced imperial tutelage with popular sovereignty as the validating principle of Indian constitutionalism. Fourthly, the popular principle was further established by the Assembly's exclusive composition of *elected* representatives of India, as opposed to *selected* leaders of bounded communities invited to imperial conferences. Lastly, the Assembly replaced the near-impossible requirement of unanimous agreement (often between those leaders of bounded and fissiparous communities) with the far more productive

procedure of majority voting. This was particularly significant: the last Secretary of State for India said of his predecessors that they ‘clung to power [in India] under the cloak of respectability lent by protection for the minorities.’⁹⁵⁹ The method, according to Cripps, was to hold that political leaders of the Muslim minority held a veto over constitutional progress that was ‘absolute.’⁹⁶⁰ The Constituent Assembly would dissolve this minority veto by minoritising non-Congress groups in a demographically proportionate Assembly operating on democratic principles. Taken together, these five anticolonial principles asserted that India was a uniform polity that could be the basis of a constitutional and legal order as opposed to a ‘mere geographical expression’ or, at the very most, a federation of incongruous parts or communities of irreconcilable difference. In doing so, it expressed a faith (misplaced in the event) that India’s vaunted divisions would be soluble in a representative institution and that agreement could be reached, without British participation, between the uniform category of Indians on the specifics of India’s constitution modernity.

As a comprehensively anticolonial idea, the Constituent Assembly can be traced as proxy for the wider and principled support for the self-determination of India through the world of the India League, Labour and eventually into the governing circles of the British Empire. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the Constituent Assembly not as an institution that was formed *after* the decision to grant India independence (which has been well-studied⁹⁶¹) but as an anticolonial idea that helped *produce* it. The first published mention of the idea was in 1932, in the pages of the *Condition of India*.⁹⁶² Thanks to the India League and its allies in Congress and the British left it swiftly became a key Congress demand and found increasing

⁹⁵⁹ William Francis Hare, Earl of Listowel, *The Rise of Labour and the Fall of Empire: the Memoirs of William Hare, Fifth Earl of Listowel*, ed. H. Kumarasingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 133.

⁹⁶⁰ HC Deb, 5.3.1947, vol. 420 col. 1422-1423.

⁹⁶¹ See, for example, Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), *The Oxford Handbook of the Indian Constitution* eds. Sujit Choudhry, Madhav Khosla and Pratap Bhanu Mehta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) and Madhav Khosla, *India’s founding moment: the construction of a most surprising democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

⁹⁶²IL, COI, 517.

support from parts of Labour. It then became the subject of a secret agreement, held in 1938, between Menon, Nehru and important sections of the Labour leadership, including both Attlee and Cripps. Cripps, supported by India League pressure within Labour and some assistance from Attlee within the War Cabinet, made it the basis of the 1942 Cripps Mission and Labour Party policy in 1945. This chapter traces the Constituent Assembly idea through the political world of the India League and the British left-wing, but also through the pathways of British policy towards and India and the negotiations between the Labour government, Congress and the Muslim League. This provides an opportunity to take a more critical view of what the India League accomplished. It also provides a useful complication of its binary of opposed anticolonialism and empire by foregrounding Indian difference, especially caste and religion. It also allows further emphasis on political party disagreement in Britain and the debordering power of political friendship. This includes the now-familiar solidarities between Labour, the India League and Congress, but also the strange alliance that emerged between the Churchillian Conservatives and Jinnah as they pursued the common goal of keeping as much of India as possible out of the hands of Congress.

The summoning of a Constituent Assembly in 1946 provides the best evidence of the India League's important role in Indian independence. Historians of transnational anticolonialism largely focus on its mobilities or solidarities as being *intrinsically* defiant of imperial hierarchies and silos, rather than measuring their contributions to overthrowing them.⁹⁶³

Antoinette Burton, for example, concludes that anticolonial movements could only 'provoke and disable if not dismantle or overturn.'⁹⁶⁴ Priyamvada Gopal does argue that 'anticolonialism in Britain sometimes did decisively shape parliamentary and media debates'⁹⁶⁵ but goes no further, leaving a gap between these and the policies of decolonisation.

⁹⁶³ See, for example, *The Anticolonial Transnational*, eds. Erez Manela and Heather Streets-Salter.

⁹⁶⁴ Antoinette Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, 146.

⁹⁶⁵ Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire*, 13.

Tim Harper's *Underground Asia* expertly charts the networks and agency of Asian revolutionaries, but theme and periodisation means that his history ends with the imperial 'order restored.'⁹⁶⁶ The India League, on the other hand, provides an example of an anticolonial transnational idea ascending to the peak of imperial-policy making, supported by an anticolonial organisation gaining increasing influence over a metropolitan political party and shaping a major decolonisation.

As Martin Thomas and Andrew Thompson note, decolonisation is 'lightly theorised'⁹⁶⁷ with much more ink spilled on it as an epistemic, cultural, pedagogical, social and, above all, ongoing project rather than a discrete historical change, sometimes reduced to mere 'flag independence.'⁹⁶⁸ This terminological shift has the potential to leave substantially intact an existing historiography which, while it might acknowledge the impact of mobilisation in the colonies, still privileges indifference,⁹⁶⁹ inevitability and post-war incapacity⁹⁷⁰ as determinate causes of decolonisation. The argument that Labour supported Indian independence through a Constituent Assembly challenges this interpretation and pluralises our causal understanding of decolonisation. It supports the older work of Partha Sarathi Gupta⁹⁷¹ and R.J. Moore.⁹⁷² Both are attentive to a distinctive Labour policy towards India (if not particularly focused on the India League's contributions) and give it weight in explaining the end of empire. It challenges Nicholas Owen's revisionist work, *The British Left and India*, which emphasizes disjuncture and disapproval between Labour and Indian aspirations, concluding that Labour preferred reform to freedom and only conceded Indian self-determination due to force of

⁹⁶⁶ Tim Harper, *Underground Asia: Global Revolutionaries and the Assault on Empire* (Penguin Allen Lane, 2020), 617.

⁹⁶⁷ Martin Thomas and Andrew S. Thompson, 'Rethinking Decolonisation: A New Research Agenda for the Twenty-First Century,' *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire* eds. Martin Thomas and Andrew S. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 3.

⁹⁶⁸ Martin Thomas and Andrew S. Thompson, 'Rethinking Decolonisation,' 4.

⁹⁶⁹ John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire: The Historical Debate* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 5, David Cannadine, *In Churchill's Shadow: Confronting the Past in Modern Britain* (London: Penguin, 2002), 26.

⁹⁷⁰ Sarah Stockwell, 'Britain and Decolonisation in an Era of Global Change' *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 65.

⁹⁷¹ Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism*.

⁹⁷² R.J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps and India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

events.⁹⁷³ Owen's interpretation dovetails neatly with historians like Bernard Porter,⁹⁷⁴ Ronald Hyam,⁹⁷⁵ Martin Shipway⁹⁷⁶ and especially John Darwin⁹⁷⁷ who hold the Second World War and the geopolitical changes it unleashed to be the determinant cause of colonial independence. Darwin, for example, affords very little role to the struggles of the colonised⁹⁷⁸ and finds the paramount cause of decolonisation to be British indifference to its empire or global, systemic geopolitical shifts brought about by war.⁹⁷⁹ Darwin directly states that 'there are strong arguments against attributing to colonial political movements the strength and cohesion' necessary to dismantle empire and that 'there are grounds for doubting whether nationalism (however powerful and decisive in certain cases) really was the crucial factor instigating Britain's imperial retreat.'⁹⁸⁰ In order for Darwin's geostrategic decolonisation to work in the India case, he needs Indian freedom to be a pure product of post-war British incapacity. Darwin cannot permit Labour to take a path that was not already an inevitability: its 'withdrawal from India in 1947' was therefore 'hardly a free choice.'⁹⁸¹ The claim that the Labour Government was 'boldly embracing the idea of India's independence' is a 'historical myth' that has been 'eagerly peddled.'⁹⁸² The more recent *Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire* also holds that while most historians would now see some combination of metropolitan weakness and anticolonial political movements in bringing about post-war imperial dissolution⁹⁸³ it remains the Second World War that 'dealt a fatal blow'⁹⁸⁴ to a global arrangement of power which sustained European empires. To this, Stuart Ward has written

⁹⁷³ Nicholas Owen, *The British Left and India*.

⁹⁷⁴ Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A short history of British Imperialism 1850-1983* (London and New York: Longman, 1975), 315.

⁹⁷⁵ Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation 1918-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 104.

⁹⁷⁶ Martin Shipway, *Decolonization and Its Impact: A Comparative Approach to the End of the Colonial Empires* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008).

⁹⁷⁷ John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*), 332.

⁹⁷⁸ John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire*, 5.

⁹⁷⁹ John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*), 22.

⁹⁸⁰ John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire*, 7.

⁹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 29.

⁹⁸² John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: the global expansion of Britain* (London: Penguin, 2013), 351.

⁹⁸³ Sarah Stockwell 'Britain and Decolonisation,' 65.

⁹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 68.

that the very term, ‘decolonisation,’ conceived as a ‘general and unstoppable historical force’ is largely a salve for wounded European pride.⁹⁸⁵ In opposing these somewhat Eurocentric metanarratives, Frederick Cooper invites us to ‘write about large-scale, long-term processes without overlooking specificity, contingency and contestation.’⁹⁸⁶

The India League provides an opportunity to offer another road to midnight, where the specific policy of a Constituent Assembly became the basis of an anticolonial campaign, powered at various times by the Spanish Universality, trades union internationalism and other forms of transnational solidarity and agency. This helped produce Britain’s policy towards Indian independence, which was contingent rather than inevitable and deeply contested rather than finding consensus across the political spectrum. The clearest way of establishing this is to prove that Labour (due to pressure or inspiration from the India League) pursued a policy towards India that the Conservatives would not have. Churchill makes this easy: he was deeply opposed to a Constituent Assembly being summoned to free India and the wider Party remained opposed to the principle of Indian self-determination.⁹⁸⁷ The argument does not rest on the counterfactual of a Conservative victory in the 1945 election: even though he was out of power, Churchill lobbied for the partition of India in order to keep some part of subcontinent out of the hands of Congress and in the Commonwealth. Rational considerations, or even the recognition of postwar capacity, were not determinant in Labour anticolonialism nor Churchillian diehardism, both of which appear to be questions of principle and, at times, great emotion. This dispels the eagerly peddled myth that empire was above party politics in Britain or that the course and nature of decolonisation reflected a consensual and liberal acceptance of its inevitability.⁹⁸⁸

⁹⁸⁵ Stuart Ward, ‘The European Provenance of Decolonisation’ *Past & Present* 230 (2016), 227-260, 246.

⁹⁸⁶ Frederick Cooper, ‘What is the Concept of Globalisation good for?’ *African Affairs*, 100: 399 (2001), 189-213, 200.

⁹⁸⁷ Nicholas Owen, ‘The Conservative Party and Indian Independence, 1945–1947,’ *The Historical Journal* 46: 1 (2003), 403-436.

⁹⁸⁸ Richard Whiting makes this argument in ‘The Empire in British Politics’, 171

This chapter also traces key decolonial policies such as the Constituent Assembly and the Cabinet Mission plan to non-official, anticolonial and prewar origins. This broadens the historiography's strictly postwar periodisation and moves away from the key analytical site of the 'official mind.' This is usually seen to be pursuing 'strategies to prevent, postpone, and manipulate the withdrawal from empire in such a way as to minimize its adverse effects on the country's global standing.'⁹⁸⁹ Britain is, however, ultimately governed not by officials but by political parties who bring to office political friendships and ideas developed in the non-official world. Labour, the India League and a Constituent Assembly are a good example. Thus, instead of an interest-maximising official mind navigating the collapse of British power, the India League's campaign among Labour for a Constituent Assembly offers a disinterested politics of friendship and solidarity that worked towards Indian independence as a matter of radical principle rather than national interest.

If the anticolonial idea of a Constituent Assembly contributed to Indian independence it also shaped Partition. Rochana Bajpai has noted that the idea of a Constituent Assembly offered Congress 'a way of cutting through the communal deadlock that was frustrating progress towards its goal of Indian independence, a route that would preserve Congress dominance in constitutional negotiations.'⁹⁹⁰ The fact that Congress would inevitably dominate any Constituent Assembly and with it, the constitutional and political future of India, was not lost on the Muslim League and others, including Ambedkar and the south Indian non-Brahmin Justice Party. Jinnah quickly emerged as a fierce critic of the Constituent Assembly, fearing the consequences of the Muslim League's inevitable reduction to a powerless minority within it and the resulting inability to secure safeguards for Muslims in independent India. As

⁹⁸⁹ Dane Kennedy, *The Imperial History Wars: Debating the British Empire* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 89

⁹⁹⁰ Rochana Bajpai, *Debating difference: group rights and liberal democracy in India*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 43.

such, my argument runs alongside Ayesha Jalal classic intervention⁹⁹¹ in seeing the Pakistan demand as not defined by absolute secessionism but by a mutable morphology of secessionist demands and a political campaign I have labelled ‘tribunician.’ I borrow the term from the protections exercised by the Roman Tribunes to protect their constituency, the Plebians, from the patrician-dominated institutions of the Republic. As such, the final demand for a sovereign Pakistan emerged, in large part, due to Jinnah’s realisation that only a Pakistani Dominion would have any tribunician protection from a fully sovereign and Congress-dominated Constituent Assembly.

The paradox of the Constituent Assembly idea is that its decolonial principles make the campaign for its implementation appear to be highly idealistic and a generous expression of faith in the political possibility of India. Conversely it reduces the multiple nationalisms jostling within an Indian Empire of plural, differentiated and asymmetric polities into a single and all-powerful national institution in which Congress would have absolute power. The Assembly demoted the value of those plural anticolonialisms, nationalisms or reforming movements (Muslim League, Dravidianist, Ambedkarite, Akali, Communist, pan-Islamic, Hindu Mahasabha etc.) from their social, cultural, critical and intellectual value (not to mention position of situated local majority) to that of a single number, and not just any number, but that frightening number that tells you that you are a minority in an impending nation. It also spoke to the question of the ordering of political freedom before social emancipation that so exercised the Muslim League, Ambedkar and the non-Brahmin/Dravidian leader, Periyar. For them, political emancipation was meaningless without social reform because, without the latter, political independence would serve only to entrench the power of caste Hindus. As Periyar put it with his usual bluntness: ‘British *Raj*,

⁹⁹¹ Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

undoubtedly, is better than Brahmin *Raj*.⁹⁹² Jinnah had insisted for more than a decade that the Muslim League would not enter a Constituent Assembly without meaningful safeguards, and yet that is precisely what Labour asked him to do. Labour's railroading of a Constituent Assembly over the objections of the Muslim League can be partly explained by the fact of it being blinkered, however. On the one side, Conservative evocation of the minority veto made it difficult for Labour to understand Jinnah's concerns as legitimate because the Conservatives had, for years, used Indian minorities shield for the *Raj*. On the other hand, the closeness between Labour and Congress, often mediated by the India League meant that Labour was more inclined to follow Congress than the Muslim League, or even the Viceroy. The Conservatives would not have secured a united India because all they would have done is eke out the *Raj*. Even when out of power Churchill and other senior Tories resisted Indian independence and even sought to partition India to keep territory out of Congress's hands and in the British Commonwealth. This led to an unlikely alliance with Jinnah and even Ambedkar. Thus, this examination of the India League's campaign for a Constituent Assembly for India demonstrates that Indian independence and partition was not just produced by British incapacity or postwar inevitabilities crashing into Indian difference, but by the interaction of specific, active, contingent and contested transnational politics of diehard imperialism, anticolonialism and difference. This chapter advances three related arguments: firstly, that the India League played a role in Indian independence through its campaign for a Constituent Assembly. Secondly, that Muslim League fear of being minoritized in a Constituent Assembly helped pave the way to Partition. Thirdly, that the end of the British Empire in India cannot be explained by postwar geostrategic collapse because key decolonial policies can be traced to prewar anticolonial initiatives.

The Origins of the Constituent Assembly Idea: Dissolving the Minority Veto

⁹⁹² Cited in K. Nambi Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance: and Dravidian Nationalism* (Madurai: Koodal, 1980), 241.

The Constituent Assembly idea emerged as a revolt against the procedures and membership structure of the Round Table Conferences (RTC), especially after the Conservatives hijacked them and thereby revealed the unreliability and cynicism of the imperial conference method. The first Conference was a joint initiative between a liberal Viceroy, Lord Irwin, Indian leaders and a (well-meaning but politically weak) Labour Prime Minister, MacDonald. As D.A. Low points out, however, 'whilst on behalf of the British government Lord Irwin the Viceroy...loudly promised Dominion status for India in 1929, in the very same breath he also declared that this could only be "the natural issue of India's constitutional development" which clearly implied that it was not to be entertained for a long while yet.' The Viceroy put the British position more pithily in private, remarking that 'it is not impossible..[to] make the shop window look respectable from an Indian point of view...while keeping your hands pretty firmly on the things that matter.'⁹⁹³ MacDonald and the Labour Party entered the Round Table proceedings with more honest intentions: dominion status and responsibility at the centre.⁹⁹⁴ Arthur Henderson, a Labour grandee, had 'been saying for years that India ought to have self-government'⁹⁹⁵ and a confidential Cabinet Paper stated quite clearly that 'communal question' must be settled by Indians and that there 'would be nothing about exploiting the communal question to British advantage.'⁹⁹⁶ There were obstacles, however. The first Conference had been boycotted by Congress because the Viceroy refused Nehru and Bhulabhai Desai's demand in the Delhi Manifesto for Congress to have 'predominant representation' at a Conference which would frame a 'Dominion Constitution for India.'⁹⁹⁷ Without Congress, the Viceroy selected representatives of a broad range of non-Congress groups. Thus, the first Conference had Labour but no Congress and a selection of Indian

⁹⁹³ Cited in D.A. Low 'The Imprint of Ambiguity', *India's Colonial Encounter: Essays in Memory of Eric Stokes* eds. Mushirul Hasan and Narayani Gupta (New Delhi: Manohar 1993), 475.

⁹⁹⁴ Nicholas Owen, *The British Left and India*, 175.

⁹⁹⁵ Hugh Dalton, diary entry, 12.11. 1930, *The Political Diary of Hugh Dalton 1918-50* ed. Ben Pimlott (London: Cape, 1986), 191.

⁹⁹⁶ Cited in Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism*, 212.

⁹⁹⁷ Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah*, 110.

leaders that were unlikely to reach the unanimous agreement demanded by the conference method. The Second Conference, after the Irwin-Gandhi pact, involved Congress, but only one representative: Gandhi. The Mahatma claimed that he represented all of India but was outflanked by representatives of India's various minority communities making a credible claim to represent India more than Congress. Moreover, the conference still required unanimity, and every leader had an effective veto over proceedings, making agreement nearly impossible, despite the presence of Gandhi. If, however, the Viceroy had conceded to the demands of the Delhi Manifesto the Conferences would have been much more productive as the proceedings would have been little more than Congress busily agreeing with itself. By 1931, even Jinnah, (who had first suggested the idea of a Conference to Irwin and Macdonald,⁹⁹⁸ an old acquaintance from the Islington Commission of 1913⁹⁹⁹) felt that if the Conference continued 'the British will only make an exhibition of our differences.'¹⁰⁰⁰

The other problem with the Conference was that it let the Tories in. MacDonald had traded Opposition membership of the Conference for its freedom to move beyond the limited Simon Commission proposals. The Conservatives were led by Hoare who was on the same quest as the Viceroy: 'to give a semblance of responsible government and yet retain the realities and verities of British control.'¹⁰⁰¹ After the formation of the National Government, MacDonald was reduced to a figurehead and Hoare increasingly dominated proceedings with a determination to put a 'Conservative imprint'¹⁰⁰² on India's constitution. This project was justified by the minority veto: 'no wide constitutional change' at the centre 'should take place without a Hindu-Muslim communal agreement.'¹⁰⁰³ Macdonald had already privately agreed with the Indian Liberals, M.R. Jayakar and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru on the terms of a

⁹⁹⁸ Ibid, 107.

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid, 35.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Ibid, 128.

¹⁰⁰¹ Samuel Hoare, Memorandum, BL/IOR/Mss.Eur E240/80.

¹⁰⁰² Nick Smart, *The National Government 1931-40* (Basingstoke: Macmillan: 1999), 70.

¹⁰⁰³ Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism*, 215.

responsible federal constitution but this was rejected by the now Conservative-dominated Cabinet Committee of the National Government interposing the minority veto, 'insisting that commitment to federal government should be phrased in such a way that would make it impossible to withdraw it if the Indians failed to settle the communal problem themselves.'¹⁰⁰⁴ MacDonald noted in his confidential diary that his Conservative colleagues 'turned down my advice that provincial autonomy was not enough. I stood alone.'¹⁰⁰⁵ MacDonald had even asked whether the Conference could be moved to India, to better obtain agreement, but the Conservatives announced that they would boycott it, if that happened.¹⁰⁰⁶ In the event, it was not Indian disunity that wrecked the prospect of responsibility at the centre but Conservative wrangling in the Federal Structures Committee. The following Third Round Table Conference was a cruel Tory joke: boycotted by Labour and without Congress, now proscribed under Civil Martial Law. Hoare eventually drafted a White Paper that contained no Dominion status (which Irwin had promised), no federal responsibility and carefully designed to keep Congress from getting a majority in the reformed assemblies.¹⁰⁰⁷

Indian constitutional progression was clearly vulnerable to being held hostage by instability in British politics. Both the RTC and the Joint Committee of Parliament (which had no Indian members) that actually authored the reforms had to reckon with the diehard revolt of eighty Tory MPs, organised by the India Defence League (IDL).¹⁰⁰⁸ The IDL had considerable funds, a premises, the ear of the *Daily Mail* and the *Morning Post* and notable sponsors like Rudyard Kipling and Sir Edward Carson.¹⁰⁰⁹ It was led by Churchill trumpeting the minority veto: 'Dominion status certainly cannot be attained while India is prey to fierce racial and

¹⁰⁰⁴ David Marquand, *James Ramsay Macdonald*, 707.

¹⁰⁰⁵ James Ramsay Macdonald, diary entry, 23.11.1931, cited in Marquand, *James Ramsay Macdonald*, 708.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Thomas Jones, diary entry, 11.3.1931, *A Diary with Letters 1931-1950* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 5.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Carl Bridge, *Holding India to the Empire: The Conservative Party and the 1935 Constitution* (New York: Envoy Press, 1986), 89.

¹⁰⁰⁸ See R.J. Moore, *The Crisis of Indian Unity 1917-1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 119 and Carl Bridge, *Holding India*, 65.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Nick Smart, *The National Government*, 73.

religious dissensions.’¹⁰¹⁰ Churchill’s current *uitlanders* were India’s dalits¹⁰¹¹ but during the war it would be Muslims and after Indian independence it would be the Nizam of Hyderabad, demonstrating the remarkable flexibility of the diehard mind. Hoare had ensured that Conservative delegates to the RTC had met with the IDL but Churchill would nevertheless seek to destroy Hoare in the privileges committee. This nearly broke up the National Government and seriously damaged his own credibility and, arguably, muted the power of his prophesising about Hitler. Churchill’s campaign had led all the way to the constituencies, making it a public fracas and Hoare feared an irrevocable split in the Conservative Party over the reforms, with the government escaping censure by the Conservative Central Council ‘by a slim margin.’¹⁰¹² As Hoare’s bill passed to the Joint Committee, Menon wrote to India describing the ‘glee in the official Tory press’ including the ‘tone of triumph in the *Daily Mail*. Winston has won.’¹⁰¹³ Menon told his Indian correspondents that he now feared that ‘fascism is not far from Albion’s shores’ with Churchill a more ‘formidable blackshirt’ than Mosley, citing Churchill’s speech to the para-fascist Anti-Socialist Union that hailed ‘the roman genius’ of Mussolini who had ‘set up a signpost in the world’ and praised Germany’s ‘splendid clear-eyed youth marching every one along the roads of the Reich...eagerly seeking the weapons of war and burning to suffer and die for the fatherland.’¹⁰¹⁴

The 1935 Act was clearly designed, in the words of its parliamentary co-pilot, the Marquess of Linlithgow, ‘to hold India to the Empire.’¹⁰¹⁵ Federation never happened, partly because Conservative diehards and British advisors to the princes lobbied hard against it. For example, Laurence Rushbrook Williams, advisor to Ranjitsinhji of Nawanagar (who was

¹⁰¹⁰ Cited in Leo McKinstry, *Attlee and Churchill: Allies in War, Adversaries in Peace* (London: Atlantic Books, 2019), 106.

¹⁰¹¹ *Winston S Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963* ed. Robert Rhodes James, 8 vols. (New York: Chelsea House, 1974), vol. 5, 5007.

¹⁰¹² Nick Smart, *The National Government*, 72.

¹⁰¹³ Menon ‘London Letter’ 19.3.1933, NMML/KMP/558.

¹⁰¹⁴ Menon, ‘London Letter’ 20.5.1933, NMML/KMP/135.

¹⁰¹⁵ Cited in Carl Bridge, *Holding India*, 153.

serving as Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes during those crucial years) was an opponent of Federation and fought hard against it.¹⁰¹⁶ One of Churchill's associates from the IDL, Lord Lymington (who also led a small, esoteric, pro-Nazi group¹⁰¹⁷) even travelled to India to rally the princes by assuring them that the Conservatives held the upper hand in the National Government.¹⁰¹⁸ The result was that the princes never joined and federation never happened. Elections under the 1935 Act were only held in 1937, producing a massive Congress victory despite the Viceroy's instructions to Governors 'to help pro-Government candidates.'¹⁰¹⁹ Two years later (justified by war) the Act's major concessions to provincial autonomy were annulled at a stroke as the *Raj* began drafting the Revolutionary Movements Ordinance. This would give Linlithgow, now Viceroy, the legal powers required to crush the Congress Party in 1942 even more brutally than Willingdon had done a decade earlier.¹⁰²⁰

In defence of these meandering constitutional procedures and cynical outcomes, the 'minority veto' had long been laid down by Conservatives as a challenge to Indians, defying them to produce a constitution that represented all shades of political opinion,¹⁰²¹ which was usually code for the support of the Muslim League.¹⁰²² Aamir Mufti has described this more broadly as the 'late imperial preoccupation with the nature of Indian society and its supposed impermeability to such forms of modern political and cultural experience as citizenship and nationality' in which 'the figure of the Muslim' emerges as 'the site for the elaboration of this impermeability'¹⁰²³ This is a political expression of the 'major element in orientalist discourse

¹⁰¹⁶ Priyasha Sakshena, *Sovereignty, international law, and the princely states of colonial South Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 149.

¹⁰¹⁷ Richard Griffiths (1998) *Patriotism Perverted: Captain Ramsay, the Right Club and English Anti-Semitism, 1939-40* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), 53.

¹⁰¹⁸ Martin Pugh, *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!': Fascists and Fascism in Britain* (London, Vintage: 2006), 106.

¹⁰¹⁹ Cited in D.A. Low 'Civil Martial Law,' 190.

¹⁰²⁰ Johannes H. Voigt 'Co-operation or Confrontation? War and Congress Politics, 1939-42,' *Congress and the Raj*, 352.

¹⁰²¹ See for example, Lord Birkenhead's challenge in parliament, HL Deb 7.7.1925 vol. 61, col. 1086.

¹⁰²² Peter Van Der Veer, 'The Foreign Hand: Orientalist Discourse in Sociology and Communalism', *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* eds. Carol Breckenridge and Peter Van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 24.

¹⁰²³ Aamir R. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 2007), 93.

about India' which is the 'essentialisation of difference between Hindus and Muslims.'¹⁰²⁴ Indeed, it is remarkable that the first mention of the idea of Pakistan in an official setting came not from the Muslim League but from a notoriously uncompromising colonial official. Barely *five months* after Choudhary Rahmat Ali first wrote the word Pakistan, it was raised as a challenge in the Joint Committee by Sir Reginald Craddock, former Home Member of the Government of India and now a Conservative MP. This led to the remarkable situation where Craddock was advancing the Pakistan scheme *against* the bewildered denials of Yusuf Ali, Zafrulla Khan and other Muslim League members. Dismissing their protests of ignorance, Craddock declared that 'you advance very quickly in India' and claimed to have 'communications about the proposal of forming a Federation of certain Muslim States under the name of Pakistan.'¹⁰²⁵ The history of Conservatives making political space available for Pakistan, as a function of the minority veto, had begun and would not cease until Pakistan was created.

Laski had been involved in planning the RTC and both he and Menon had watched its proceedings closely. A constitutional procedure needed to be found that was not dependent on a now devastated and divided Labour Party and which could be entirely insulated from the likes of Churchill and Craddock. This procedure could not allow communal disagreement at conferences to block constitutional progress, something which had helped derail both the Nehru Report and the RTC, both of which had unanimous, all-party, agreement as its criterion for success. The *Condition of India* therefore argued that "the principle of self-determination, in our view, can be implemented only through a Constituent Assembly' rather than an 'ad hoc conference' such as the 'all-party conference' because it afforded a 'false value' to individuals or small groups who could 'by threats to "walk out" defeat the purpose of the conference and

¹⁰²⁴ Peter Van Der Veer, 'The Foreign Hand', 24.

¹⁰²⁵ Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah*, 132.

challenge its basis, which is “all party assent.”¹⁰²⁶ While the conferences had achieved representativeness by the number of communities represented, the Constituent Assembly would simply include ‘representatives who have the mandate of their constituents and are amenable to a democratic procedure.’ In other words, it would represent the uniform category of Indians as citizens of an emerging and modern nation, rather than bounded, ascriptive and fissiparous groups within an empire.

The Assembly would also have a substantial Congress majority. While the importance of ‘providing for minority opinion’¹⁰²⁷ was recognised, the method of doing so was not mentioned. Thus, the Constituent Assembly would have both legitimacy and a guaranteed Muslim League minority, limiting that organisation’s ability to influence the proceedings, dissolve its minority veto and binding it to any decisions made. Thus, minority power over constitutional advancement was reduced from the ‘false value’ of *parity at the imperial conference* requiring unanimity or expressed agreement to a *minority in a decolonising Assembly* that had the majority vote as its operating and legitimating principle. This was a solution that used the unimpeachably liberal values of democratic representation and majority voting to disempower the minority whose very existence was held by the Empire (and especially the Conservatives) to be the principal obstacle between the colony and modernity. In the very moment, however, that the asserted incommensurability of India and modernity, expressed through the inevitable and indefinite irreconcilability between Hindu and Muslim, was rejected by the invocation of an institution that was both premised on, and politically enabled, both decolonial communal reconciliation and the possibility of an Indian political modernity, one of those two now-reconcilable interests was robbed of all power by being put firmly in its demographic place.

¹⁰²⁶ IL, COI, 517-518.

¹⁰²⁷ Ibid, 517.

The political context of the *Condition of India* visit is also important evidence of its minoritising intent. One of the delegation's financial supporters had been Mohan Madan Malaviya, a critic of separate electorates which he saw as a ploy to preserve British power by reducing the non-official majority in the councils.¹⁰²⁸ He had opposed the Lucknow Pact, agitated against reserved electorates and co-founded the Hindu Mahasabha within Congress to fight against them. Interestingly, Motilal Nehru blamed the Mahasabha for destroying the Nehru Report conference because of its refusal to compromise with the Muslim League on separate electorates.¹⁰²⁹ Naturally, the *Condition of India* preferred the Lothian franchise to that provided by the Communal Award as the latter gave greater political weightage to minorities, including Muslims.¹⁰³⁰ Equally, the *Condition of India* lavished praise on the Congress Party, arguing that its message 'finds a response in the hearts of the villagers, the humble town-dwellers, the professional classes and the intellectuals.'¹⁰³¹ It files away the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha (which was, apparently, 'culturally and socially... of a progressive character'¹⁰³²) under 'sectional groups' with only Congress and the National Liberal Federation afforded the title of national. The book is also very attentive to the category of 'nationalist Moslems' who 'takes the view that he is an Indian first and last' despite being 'good and professing Mussalmans' and were apparently, 'mainly, but not entirely, adherents of Congress.'¹⁰³³ Thus, the *Condition of India*, as much as the idea of a Constituent Assembly itself, built a liberal vision of India upon an erasure of Muslim political difference.

¹⁰²⁸ Prabhu Bapu, *Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North India: Constructing Nation and History 1915-1930* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 138.

¹⁰²⁹ Prabhu Bapu, *Hindu Mahasabha*, 143.

¹⁰³⁰ IL, COI, 517.

¹⁰³¹ Ibid, 89.

¹⁰³² Ibid, 126.

¹⁰³³ Ibid, 118.

The Transnational Campaign for a Constituent Assembly, 1932-1940

While in India, the delegation had discussed the Constituent Assembly idea with such Congress leaders ‘as were outside prison.’¹⁰³⁴ In 1933 Nehru called for ‘The Indian People to settle their own Constitution in a popularly elected constituent assembly’ as only that could solve political conflicts.¹⁰³⁵ Menon swiftly secured a formal demand for the Constituent Assembly through Bhulabhai Desai¹⁰³⁶ who, at a Conference held in Ranchi for Congress leaders associated with the New Swarajaya Party, succeeded in issuing the demand for a Constituent Assembly in India for the very first time.¹⁰³⁷ Along with Nehru, Desai would emerge as a major champion of the Constituent Assembly in India, making it a key Congress demand.¹⁰³⁸ Desai was also a member of the Congress Working Committee which soon called for a Constituent Assembly as the ‘only satisfactory alternative’ to Hoare’s White Paper. In an accompanying critique of the Communal Award, Congress declared that it was the duty of the Assembly to ‘determine the method of representation of important minorities and make provision for otherwise safeguarding their interests.’¹⁰³⁹ India’s minorities were therefore being asked to place their faith in an institution in which they were already *powerless minorities*. Hackles were already being raised: The non-Brahmin Justice Party of the Madras Presidency publicly opposed the Constituent Assembly idea.¹⁰⁴⁰ The Congress Working Committee nevertheless repeated the Constituent Assembly demand the next year,¹⁰⁴¹ (protesting the Joint Committee of Parliament), followed by the 49th Session of Congress (protesting the arrival of the 1935 Government of India Act).¹⁰⁴² Thus, the Constituent

¹⁰³⁴ Ibid, 520.

¹⁰³⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru, ‘Exploitation of India,’ 2.10.1933, SWJN, 11, 40.

¹⁰³⁶ Menon to Bhulabhai Desai, 4.5.1934, NMML/KMP/179.

¹⁰³⁷ *The Framing of India’s Constitution: Select Documents* eds., Benegal Shiva Rao, Vaddake Kuruppe, Nandan Menon, Subhash C. Kashyap, N.K.N. Iyengar, 2 cols. (Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1966), 1, 76 (hereafter, FIC)

¹⁰³⁸ *Times of India*, 22.11.1937

¹⁰³⁹ ‘Congress Resolution on the White Paper and the Communal Award’, 17-18.6.1934, FIC 1, 77.

¹⁰⁴⁰ *Times of India*, 3.7.1935.

¹⁰⁴¹ Congress Party, Resolution on the Joint Parliamentary Committee Report, 4-7.12.1934’, FIC, 1, 79.

¹⁰⁴² Congress Party, Resolution on the Government of India Act (49th Session of the Indian National Congress), 12-14.4.1936, FIC, 1, 80.

Assembly became Congress's clear and consistent protest against every step in the Conservative's cynical constitutional process. It was also becoming deeply integrated into India nationalism: Gandhi helped K.M. Munshi draft a history of Constituent Assemblies for *The Hindustan Times*, which elevated the institution to dizzying heights, as 'the symbol of India's freedom and the source of her people's strength.'¹⁰⁴³

The Constituent Assembly idea soon became a rallying point for the India League and its British allies to protest the new Conservative direction on India. Barely a year after *The Condition of India* was published Lansbury wrote in a book that 'we should ask Indian themselves to summon a Constituent Assembly.'¹⁰⁴⁴ The India League made extracts from the *Condition of India* the basis of a memorandum, sponsored by Laski and signed by Russell, Grenfell and the quaker Horace Alexander for circulation among the Socialist League, the Labour Party and 'various persons of influence.' It argued that 'a Constituent Assembly is the obvious method of implementing self-determination which is the accepted Labour policy.'¹⁰⁴⁵ By August 1934 the India League had managed to get a resolution on India onto the agenda of the Labour Party's annual conference where Menon spoke in favour of Indian independence and moved a resolution, seconded by Betty Fraser of the London University Labour Club (which had earlier passed an India League resolution that noted the advances of the Attlee draft and called for Labour to reject the report of the Joint Committee¹⁰⁴⁶) which declared that 'The Conference therefore supports the demand of the Indian people for a Constituent Assembly to be elected in India.'¹⁰⁴⁷ The resolution did not pass but at the 1935 Party Conference, Attlee, on behalf of the National Executive and the Party Conference, accepted a resolution put forward by Fraser which called for 'freely elected representatives of the Indian

¹⁰⁴³ Arvind Elangovan "We the People?" Politics and the conundrum of framing a constitution on the eve of decolonisation', *The Indian Constituent Assembly: Deliberations on Democracy* ed. Udit Bhatia (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 19.

¹⁰⁴⁴ George Lansbury, *My England* (London: Selwyn and Blount, 1934), 173.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Menon to H.N. Brailsford, 30.5.1934, NMML/KMP/179.

¹⁰⁴⁶ See NMML/KMP/464.

¹⁰⁴⁷ LP/RAC, 1934.

people' to 'formulate a settlement of the problems of India.' Her accompanying speech roundly criticised the 1935 Government of India act and called for the next Labour Government to 'to set up in in India a Constituent Assembly.'¹⁰⁴⁸ In 1936 the Socialist League, led by Cripps, passed a resolution at its annual conference which declared that it 'would give self-determination [to India] through a freely elected Indian Constituent Assembly, to annul restrictive penal laws, release political prisoners, ensure free speech and assembly, encourage organisation of workers and peasants to take an effective part in the Constituent Assembly.'¹⁰⁴⁹ When Labour finally, officially, supported the Assembly, it did not go unnoticed in India: the *Hindustan Times* reported on the 1937 Labour Conference under the headline 'British Support to Constituent Assembly: Labour Resolution on India.'¹⁰⁵⁰

At the end of 1936, in Faizpur, Congress accepted an enlarged scheme for a Constituent Assembly at a large and important meeting of the party: Nehru clearly articulated it as an anticolonial demand in his Presidential speech, as:

the very-corner-stone of Congress policy and our election campaign must be based on it. This Assembly must not be conceived as something emanating from the British government or as a compromise with British imperialism. If it is to have any reality it must have the will of the people behind it and the organized strength of the masses to support it and the power to draw up the constitution of a free India. We have to create that mass support.'¹⁰⁵¹

¹⁰⁴⁸ LP/RAC, 1935.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Michael Bors, *The Socialist League*, 289.

¹⁰⁵⁰ *Hindustan Times*, 18.9.1937.

¹⁰⁵¹ Nehru, Presidential Speech at the Faizpur Congress, 27.12.1936, FIC 1, 87.

Nehru intended, therefore, for Congress to contest the 1937 elections on the issue of rejecting the 1935 Act and replacing it with a Constituent Assembly. After its extraordinary victory in the 1937 election Congress declared that ‘demand for a constituent assembly has been endorsed in a clear and unambiguous manner by the country at the recent general election.’¹⁰⁵² After 1937, Congress’s claim to speak for India looked legitimate – by 1938 the party would have 4.5 million members – and resolutions demanding a Constituent Assembly were passed by Congress-run Assemblies in provinces throughout British India and in the Central Assembly, a feat of political cohesion.¹⁰⁵³ Congress leaders were not shy about whom the Constituent Assembly was aimed at, however. S. Satyamurti, a ‘constitutionalist from Madras’ spoke in the Central Legislative Assembly, calling for a Constituent Assembly based on adult franchise which ‘must make an instructive appeal...to every Muslim member who by his religion believes in democracy.’ He also argued that ‘the Communal Award is there, not so much to help Muslims...but to help the perpetuation of British imperialism in this country.’¹⁰⁵⁴ Much later, writing in *Harijan* in 1940, Gandhi stated that ‘only the Constituent Assembly will be in position to give reply’¹⁰⁵⁵ to the question of minorities. C. Rajagopalachari held that any constitution drafted by an elected assembly of the Indians was sacrosanct: ‘no self-constituted representatives can thereafter have the right to make counter-proposals and keep the issue alive.’¹⁰⁵⁶ The very need to make a clean break with colonialism, to ensure that Constitutional proposals were not subject to revision by a committee including Churchills and Craddock, gave the Assembly a dangerously terminal character which precluded the possibility of a gradual, agonistic politics to reconcile communal differences.

¹⁰⁵² Congress Party, ‘Resolution on the Joint Parliamentary Committee Report’ 4-7.12.1934, FIC 1, 79.

¹⁰⁵³ Congress Party, ‘Resolutions in the Provincial Assemblies Regarding the Constituent Assembly’, (various resolutions passed in 1937 by Bihar, Bombay, Central Provinces, Orissa, United Provinces, North-West Frontier and Madras), FIC 1, 93-94.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Cited in Arvind Elangovan, “We the People”, 20-21.

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Harijan*, 29.6.1940.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Cited in Arvind Elangovan, “We the People”, 21.

This was the coldest of comforts to Ambedkar after the Poona Pact and the Muslim League after Congress refused to share power with them after 1937. Of course, Rajagopalachari's 'self-constituted representative' was Jinnah. In 1937 the Quaid informed the twenty-fifth session of the Muslim League that 'a Constituent Assembly can only be called by a sovereign authority...the Congress is still far from occupying the seat of authority; it is a travesty of realities to think of the British Government calling a Constituent Assembly as for the ability of Congress to do so, that is pure moonshine.'¹⁰⁵⁷ If Congress's anticolonial campaign for a Constituent Assembly showed a remarkable consistency, so too did the Muslim League's opposition to it. This was not due to a collaborative instinct with empire, but because of its tribunician politics. In the Roman Republic, the most important power of the Tribune of the Plebs was to veto the acts of the wider Roman magistracy to protect the plebian class from a Roman state controlled by the patricians. The Tribune had to be drawn from the plebian class, was sacrosanct and held a veto that was absolute. This reveals the sensibility that, within the universalist bounds of Roman citizenship and law, a particular community needed stronger protections because of its social weakness and the fact that the Roman state was really a creature of a particularity, the patricians. The office of the Tribune was conceded to prevent the plebeians from ceding from the Roman Republic and speaks to the social contractarian nature of Indian independence and partition, or rather the failure to sign that social contract. Thanks to colonialism, the social contract that would birth the Indian state was not between sovereign and subject, but between Congress and the Muslim League. The Muslim League's terms for this contract, like that demanded by the plebs, was tribunician protections. This was not the absolute power of the veto and took a mutable form: separate legislatures, communal franchise, a thin executive, guarantees and provincial groupings. The Constituent Assembly, on the other hand, was an institution that Labour would not circumscribe and, while

¹⁰⁵⁷ Jinnah, Presidential address to the Twenty-Fifth Session of the All-India Muslim League', 15-18.10.1937, *Foundations of Pakistan: All India Muslim League Documents 1906-1947* ed. Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, 2 vols. (Karachi: National Public House, 1924-47), vol 2, 275 (hereafter, FP).

universalist, was also a creature of a particularity: Congress. It also offered no ameliorative tribunician protections to Muslim India. Read against an increasingly looming Constituent Assembly, Jinnah's tribunician politics was prior to his secessionist position because the radicalisation of the Pakistan demand towards its final and unambiguously territorial form was a function of the diminishing prospects for Muslim tribunician protections in a Constituent Assembly that Congress and Labour were increasingly united in calling for.

In 1937, in the Central Assembly, Jinnah called instead for a constitutional Conference based on the Communal award. Moreover, the rights of Muslims and other minorities could only be reformed the by the 'mutual consent of the Communities concerned,'¹⁰⁵⁸ a fairly reasonable tribunician demand. His amendments were not accepted, and a Congress speaker bitterly attacked the one tribunician protection currently standing: the Communal Award.¹⁰⁵⁹ In the assembly of the United Provinces, a resolution on a Constituent Assembly was introduced by Malaviya's son, who grumbled about the injustice to Hindus represented by electoral reservations.¹⁰⁶⁰ Vijaylakshmi Pandit then declared that 'the whole country has condemned the present constitution as unacceptable, and the Congress has won the elections on the basis of this question' and demanded 'a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult franchise.' Mohammed Ismail Khan moved an amendment which *did not reject a Constituent Assembly* but merely made the demand for tribunician protections, that 'the representation of Muslims to the Constituent Assembly shall be the same as that provided by the Communal Award' and that the Assembly should not have absolute sovereignty: it should not be competent to 'alter or vary the personal law or the existing civil, political and religious right of Muslims without the consent of three-fourths of the Muslim representatives.'¹⁰⁶¹ Congress

¹⁰⁵⁸ *Times of India*, 15.9.1937.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Satyamurti, Speech to the Central Legislative Assembly, 17.9.1937, FIC 1, 96.

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Times of India*, 8.9.1937.

¹⁰⁶¹ *Times of India*, 6.9.1937.

threw out the amendments, prompting a Muslim League walkout.¹⁰⁶² This appeal to tribunicial protections reveals that Muslim League fears clearly extended, rightly or wrongly, beyond constitutional provisions to include the prospect of Congress's deep interference in Muslim social, cultural and religious life via an all-powerful Assembly. The irony is that the Muslim League's inability to include tribunicial protections within a resolution *about* a Constituent Assembly from inside an elected legislature provided them with the best predictor of what would happen to them *inside* a Constituent Assembly with no tribunicial protections of its own.

By 1942 the Muslim League would witness a strange and ominous event: a representative of a government led by the diehard Churchill arriving in India with a proposal for a Constituent Assembly – the most advanced and feared of Congress's demands – as an official concession. This cannot be explained without the India League. It had already organised a public meeting to discuss the Faizpur session of Congress, where Menon described the 1935 Act as fascist and noted Congress's strategy to 'wreck the federation' from within.¹⁰⁶³ After Congress swept the polls, the India League made a concerted effort to turn the victory into an endorsement of the Constituent Assembly.¹⁰⁶⁴ Labour MPs on the India League's parliamentary committee issued a statement that congratulated 'the people of India on the remarkable victory won by them in the recent election.' The victory was against 'anti-democratic devices' incorporated in the 1935 Act and vindicated 'the claim of the Congress to represent the Indian people' as claimed by 'Gandhi at the Round Table Conference.' The statement also said that 'the elections were fought' on the points of rejecting the new constitution, 'the Congress goal of Independence,' a program of relief for the 'peasantry, the industrial workers and the masses generally' and for 'the calling of a Constituent Assembly elected on a mass basis for the

¹⁰⁶² *Times of India*, 8.9.1937.

¹⁰⁶³ ENSYR, 10.1.1937, BL/IOR/L/PJ/450.

¹⁰⁶⁴ India League to Kriplani, n.d., NMML/KMP/186.

purpose of determining the political and economic future of India.’¹⁰⁶⁵ IPI noted that by 1937 Menon believed ‘the idea of a Constituent Assembly as of extreme importance....he believes it must be kept in the public eye in India as a rallying point for the development of the campaign for Indian freedom.’¹⁰⁶⁶

By 1938, the solidarities of the Spanish Universality had brought the India League prominence and access to Britain’s left-wing elites. From as early as 1934 Menon had been discussing the idea of a Constituent Assembly with Cripps, asking him if he had read the *Condition of India*, and assuring him that Nehru stood persuaded by its merits.¹⁰⁶⁷ Nehru was also drawing close to a wider section of the Labour leadership: in 1935 Attlee, Lansbury and Morgan Jones had interceded with the Secretary of State for India to release Nehru from prison due to his wife’s illness. While in London in 1936 Nehru met with Leonard Woolf, Cripps, Wilkinson, Laski, George Caitlin, Hugh Gaitskell, Arthur Creech-Jones and Richard Crossman, while Grenfell introduced him to other Labour MPs.¹⁰⁶⁸ Although by 1937 the Socialist League had been dissolved as Labour rejected alliances with communists, this did not necessarily block the India League’s access to some of the major power-brokers in the Party. Wilkinson and Laski had been elected to the National Executive Committee and they formed part a wider grouping through their association with the *Tribune* magazine. This included Aneurin Bevan, who would frequent India League headquarters over the road from the *Tribune* offices¹⁰⁶⁹ and ask parliamentary questions on its behalf.¹⁰⁷⁰ In 1935 Nehru gave the India League a quasi-official status¹⁰⁷¹ and during his 1938 visit ‘made a stipulation that he could not be seen without a previous appointment to be made with Krishna Menon.’¹⁰⁷²

¹⁰⁶⁵ IPI, copy of a statement by the parliamentary committee of the India League, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/450.

¹⁰⁶⁶ IPI to Silver, 1.2.37, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Menon to Cripps, 22.3.1934, NMML/KMP/179.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism*, 257.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevan: a biography* (St. Albans: Paladin, 1975), 453.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Menon to Bevan, 26.4.1934, and Bevan to Menon n.d., NMML/KMP/179.

¹⁰⁷¹ Nehru to Rajendra Prasad 20.11.1935 NAI/Home/Pol.1936/1/2.

¹⁰⁷² ENSYR, 10.8.1938, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/293.

Cripps began using the League's good offices to secure a meeting between Nehru and some Labour leaders¹⁰⁷³ with Menon and Cripps organising¹⁰⁷⁴ a secret meeting at Cripps's country home, Goodfellows, in the Oxfordshire village of Filkins. This included Menon, Nehru, Cripps, Laski, Crossman, Bevan, Leonard Barnes and Attlee.

Although Attlee had been a member of the Simon Commission, he repudiated its majority report. The 1930 Labour Party Conference noted that

the Labour members of the Committee [Simon Commission] voted against its adoption and set out their conclusions in an alternative draft...They would abolish the Council of State and form the Central Legislature on the British side by direct election...they objected to making responsibility at the Centre depend on the adherence of a certain number of Princes, and proposed that Federation should be constituted forthwith with such states as would join.¹⁰⁷⁵

Attlee and all four Labour members of the Joint Committee that produced the 1935 Act voted against its findings and produced the 'Attlee Draft' that offered the crucial concession of self-government at the centre through executive responsibility to a central legislature, a reduction in Princely and Viceregal power, a wider franchise, the transfer of foreign policy and a clear timetable for dominion status.¹⁰⁷⁶ Naturally, his Party had boycotted the third RTC and opposed the third reading of the bill in the House. At the 1934 Party Conference, Attlee stated that; 'The Party is entirely unbound by anything that may be done by the Joint Committee. It is entirely uncommitted to any Government proposals whatever. The only thing it is

¹⁰⁷³ Cripps to Menon, 23.10.1935, KMP/NMML/182

¹⁰⁷⁴ Gwendoline Hill to Menon, 12.6.1938, KMP/NMML/278

¹⁰⁷⁵ LP/RAC, 1930.

¹⁰⁷⁶ John Bew, *Citizen Clem*, 187.

committed to is the policy of this Party as laid down by the annual conference.’¹⁰⁷⁷ Attlee’s own view of the 1935 Act was that it failed ‘to provide a medium through which the living forces of India can operate’ and relied upon ‘the dead India of the past.’¹⁰⁷⁸ He criticised the way it was ‘deliberately framed to as to exclude as far as possible the Congress Party from effective powers’ and described it as a ‘continuation of the debate at the Conservative Conference.’¹⁰⁷⁹

Labour’s leader was open to a new constitutional direction for India. Discussions at Goodfellows ranged widely but pledged support to an ‘opportunity for self-determination by means of a Constituent Assembly’ in India based on ‘existing electoral machinery.’ This was to be without parliamentary approval, something that ‘constitutional lawyers of high repute’ believed to be possible, while the question of the India Princes would be ‘held over.’ The army would simply be ‘taken over by the new Indian government’¹⁰⁸⁰ and Indian debt could be paid for by buying British goods. All other outstanding issues and obligations of Britain’s long empire in India, including minority issues, were to be covered by a treaty which implied parity between Britain and India. This was a remarkably easy digestion of the vaunted obstacles to the final fulfilment of Indian self-determination. Back in London, Menon arranged for Nehru to meet again with Attlee and others in the House of Commons¹⁰⁸¹ and the Goodfellows proposals were further discussed at the General Council of the Trade Union Congress, arranged by the General Secretary of the Labour Party, James Middleton¹⁰⁸² as well as an ‘informal meeting of the Labour executive, among them being Attlee, [Hugh] Dalton, Stafford Cripps, Herbert Morrison, David Grenfell, Laski and Morgan [Jones].’ Nehru noted

¹⁰⁷⁷ LP/RAC, 1934.

¹⁰⁷⁸ HC Deb 4.6.1935, vol. 302 col. 1824-5.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Kenneth Harris, *Attlee* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1995), 114

¹⁰⁸⁰ Nehru, ‘Note to the Congress Working Committee’, 1.8.1938, SWJN, 9, 98-99. See also TNA/CAB/127/60, Leonard Barnes, *Empire or Democracy: A Study of the Colonial Question* (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd. 1939), 265-273, Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism*, 258-259, R.J. Moore, *Escape from Empire: The Attlee Government and the India Problem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 6.

¹⁰⁸¹ Menon to Major Attlee, 28.6.1938, NMML/KMP/278.

¹⁰⁸² Menon to Middleton, 25.6.1938, NMML/KMP/278.

at the time that 'these leaders, it must be remembered, include all the moderate and most cautious of the Labour group' and that 'Labour now admits that the only solution of the Indian problem is complete self-determination. So far as the Conservatives are concerned, we have disturbed their minds, but not their loyalty to the present Indian policy.'¹⁰⁸³ In an article for the *Daily Worker* and reprinted in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Nehru called for Labour to 'declare for the Independence of India and for the right of the people there to frame their own constitution through a constituent assembly.' He was gratified that 'the leaders of British Labour are thinking on these lines. It is still more pleasing to find the rank and file of the labour movement responding enthusiastically to this call of freedom.'¹⁰⁸⁴ Nehru received encouragement from India that Gandhi fully supported these approaches¹⁰⁸⁵ and wrote back, perhaps somewhat giddily that 'England, largely on account of Menon's efforts, is becoming anti-imperialist.'¹⁰⁸⁶ Nehru later used the 'scheme the India League put forward,' in his negotiations with the Viceroy.¹⁰⁸⁷ In 1939 he wrote to Menon that 'Gandhiji has now become a complete convert'¹⁰⁸⁸ to the idea of an Indian Constituent Assembly.

A year later Cripps travelled to India to solicit the views of Indian political leaders on the Goodfellows agreement. Cripps permitted himself to hope that if there was enough support in India then 'there will be a real chance of its acceptance'¹⁰⁸⁹ in Britain. He also believed that his private tour had the 'moral support' of influential members of the House of Commons, including the usual Labour figures, Liberals and even some Conservatives.¹⁰⁹⁰ Cripps started discussing with the India League whom he should meet in India and Menon asked Nehru to

¹⁰⁸³ Nehru, 'Note to the Congress Working Committee,' 1.8.1938, SWJN, vol. 9, 101.

¹⁰⁸⁴ *Daily Worker*, 29.6.1938 and *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 6.8.1938, SWJN, vol 9, 30.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Kripalani to Nehru, 9.9.1938, SWJN 9, 101.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Menon to Kripalani, 24.8.38, Ibid, 114

¹⁰⁸⁷ Nehru to Menon, 6.10.1939, SWJN 10, 174.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Nehru to Menon, 25.11.1939, SWJN 10, 253.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Cripps, diary entry, 21, 28 and 29.11.1939, MD, Bod./CP/Mss.9661/3

¹⁰⁹⁰ R.J. Moore 'London's India Policy' *Congress and the Raj* ed. D.A. Low, 386

‘arrange a program.’¹⁰⁹¹ Cripps drew heavily on the India League network in India, meeting Nehru, Desai, Mira Behn, Agatha Harrison, the Brailsfords and B. Shiva Rao. He also discussed the Goodfellows scheme with Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan, Gandhi, Morarji Desai, Vallabhai Patel, Rajagopalachari, Maulana Azad, M.N. Roy and the Punjabi Unionist leader, Sir Sikander Ryat. Cripps even met the Viceroy who expressed his lesser ambition to ‘get the second part [federation] of the 1935 Act going.’¹⁰⁹² Linlithgow began writing letters back to the Secretary of State for India that eviscerated the idea of a Constituent Assembly because of the impossibility of getting ‘Muslims into any Hindu dominated Assembly.’¹⁰⁹³ The Viceroy was not entirely correct, however: Jinnah told Cripps that he could accept a Constituent Assembly, but not one that was fully sovereign. It had to be accompanied by tribunician protections: a ‘thin executive,’ existing communal franchises, guarantees in a treaty and a membership limited to ‘only organised parties,’¹⁰⁹⁴ Interestingly, in 1946, the Muslim League would agree to enter the Constituent Assembly on the condition of broadly similar tribunician safeguards to those discussed with Cripps in 1939, indicating the consistency of his tribunician politics.

As early as 1936 Nehru was predicting that a Constituent Assembly would, by representing the masses, make economic issues the subject of substantial debate, thereby relegating ‘superficial ones, like the communal one.’¹⁰⁹⁵ He now attacked the Muslim League in terms that his socialist comrade would understand by distinguishing between the ‘the common people who are supporters of Congress and the landlords or middle class who are the main supporters of the Muslim League.’ He told Cripps that an Assembly based on adult suffrage would bypass the ‘elite’ League because it would ‘throw up a new class of [Muslim] political

¹⁰⁹¹ Cripps, diary entry, 31.10.1939, MD, Bod./CP/Mss.9661/3

¹⁰⁹² Cripps, diary entry, 23.12.1939, MD, Bod./CP/Mss.9661/4

¹⁰⁹³ R.J. Moore ‘London’s India Policy,’ 387

¹⁰⁹⁴ Cripps, diary entry, 12.12.1939, MD, Bod./CP/Mss.9661/4.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Cited in Arvind Elangovan, “We the People”, 21.

leadership.¹⁰⁹⁶ In Nehru's formula, the Constituent Assembly would not threaten Indian Muslims because they would cease to exist as a meaningful political category. Thus, the birth of liberal India in Constituent Assembly was premised upon the (and would help produce) the destruction of Muslim political difference. To support this argument Cripps was even taken to a Conference of the Momin community which duly accused Jinnah's organisation of class exploitation. Gandhi had already written in his newspaper, *Harijan*, that a Constituent Assembly was the only way to 'solve the communal problems' and while he conceded electoral reservation to 'every real minority' he maintained Muslim minoritization by limiting reservation 'to its numerical strength.'¹⁰⁹⁷ Despite this, Gandhi told Cripps that any Assembly based on communal representation 'would do more harm than good,' and reduced tribunician protections to Congress goodwill, telling Cripps that 'HMG...must rely on Congress and the C.A. to safeguard the minorities, as of course they must.'¹⁰⁹⁸ Thus, the crucial disagreements of 1946-1947, between Congress's demand for a fully sovereign, anticolonial, Constituent Assembly and the Muslim League's demand for tribunician protections from the absolute power of that very Congress-dominated and sovereign Constituent Assembly, were already being rehearsed with Cripps in 1939. Faisal Devji draws our attention to the various transnational and imperial imaginaries offered by Muslim leaders and thinkers where the question of minority and majority would not be relevant categories of rule in a nation.¹⁰⁹⁹ Against these, the Constituent Assembly appears narrowing and totalising: a single body that would take in all of India as a patchwork of provinces, principalities, transnational affiliations and imaginaries as well as plural senses of the value of communities and situated positions of local majority and reduce them, with brutal clarity, to *a number lower than the Congress* and base a new nation state upon that very power relationship. This politics of numbers was just

¹⁰⁹⁶ Cripps, diary entry, 8.12.1939, MD, Bod./CP/Mss.9661/4.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Gandhi, 'The Only Way', *Harijan*, 25.11.1939.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Cripps, diary entry, 20.12.1939, MD, Bod./CP/Mss.9661/4.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Faisal Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 75.

as clear to Ambedkar, who told Cripps that the Constituent Assembly ‘would be merely an assembly of so many representatives of Gandhi.’¹¹⁰⁰

In 1939 Cripps used the India League to develop a parallel network of connections, bypassing the sclerotic bureaucracy and hostile Viceroy, provoking the idea of superseding the official mind entirely through an ‘*ad hoc*’ delegation of three members with plenipotentiary powers.’¹¹⁰¹ Labour would later achieve this with the Cabinet Mission, a useful reminder of the prewar and non-official origins of fundamental decolonial initiatives. Returning to the ‘anticolonial transnational’ the case might be made to include Cripps in this important category. At around the same time that he was sounding out Indian leaders on the Constituent Assembly, he was writing to Nehru asking him to advise ‘my friend Norman Manley’¹¹⁰² on developing a mass anticolonial party in an agrarian country and would appear on the platform when Manley launched the Jamaican People’s National Party. Cripps was also financially supporting Peter Blackman and pleading Paul Robeson for more money on his behalf.¹¹⁰³ The criterion of sustained anticolonial transnational activity is so established, and if British persons are denied important category, it runs the risk of a backdoor rehabilitation of one of the most dangerous fixities of empire: race. This is important because it is thanks to Cripps with help from Sorensen, the India League and Attlee, that the India League’s anticolonial idea of a Constituent Assembly became policy, allowing us to relocate the origins of the key decolonial policies from the official mind to the world of anticolonial networks operating within the structures of the British imperial state.

The Goodfellows Agreement Becomes Policy:

¹¹⁰⁰ Cripps, diary entry, 15.12.1939, MD, Bod./CP/Mss.9661/4.

¹¹⁰¹ Peter Clarke, *The Cripps Version: The Life of Sir Stafford Cripps* (London: Penguin, 2003 ed.), 142.

¹¹⁰² Cripps, confidential diary, Bod./CP/Mss.9661/2.

¹¹⁰³ Cripps, diary entry, 21.11.1939, MD, Bod./CP/Mss.9661/3.

The India League and the Cripps Mission 1939-1942

Before he left for India, Cripps was pressing the Goodfellows proposals, with help from Sorensen, upon the Secretary of State for India, the Marquess of Zetland and the Permanent Under-Secretary, Findlater Stewart as well as other senior civil servants and MPs across party lines. He believed that he had obtained broad support for a 'Constituent Assembly within one year of the termination of the war' though a notable exception was the former Viceroy, Irwin, now Lord Halifax. Their interaction reveals the imperialism of the conference method, the anticolonialism of the Constituent Assembly and their imbrication with the minority veto. While Cripps argued that Congress represented the 'majority of British India' and suggested summoning a Constituent Assembly, Halifax preferred a 'consultative committee' because he 'did not accept Congress as speaking for the Indian people and that we must look after the other Indians' and that as a result 'it was impossible for us to withdraw.'¹¹⁰⁴ The coloniality of the conference can be further be seen in a speech to Benares Hindu University by the Chief Justice of India: he dismissed the Constituent Assembly format as it had failed to produce durable constitutions in Europe and praised the conference method for its success in the British Dominions.¹¹⁰⁵ This also explains the otherwise puzzlingly abrupt change in direction, after the war, between Churchill's (entirely cynical¹¹⁰⁶) imperial Conference in Simla and Labour's decolonising Constituent Assembly.

In 1939 the Constituent Assembly idea had the first of several explosive encounters with Churchill. It began with a meeting between Sorensen and the Marquess of Zetland. Sorensen declared that the Round Table method had failed and that the Constituent Assembly was now a clear Congress demand.¹¹⁰⁷ Zetland promised Sorensen and Cripps that he would take the

¹¹⁰⁴ Cripps, diary entry, 31.10.1939, MD, Bod./CP/Mss.9661/3.

¹¹⁰⁵ Shibani Kinkar Chaube, *Constituent Assembly of India: Springboard of Revolution* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973), 24.

¹¹⁰⁶ Churchill wanted it to fail and knew it would, see Wavell, diary entry, 31.8.1945, *Wavell Journal*, 168.

¹¹⁰⁷ Sorensen to the Marquess of Zetland, 30.9.1939, NMML/KMP/187.

Goodfellows proposals to the War Cabinet¹¹⁰⁸ where Churchill, now First Lord of the Admiralty, detonated, holding that nothing needed to be done as the communal ‘feud’ was a ‘bulwark of British rule in India.’¹¹⁰⁹ The idea was now seen as so subversive by the Conservatives that the Viceroy had been expressly instructed by Neville Chamberlain not to ‘promise a Constituent Assembly’¹¹¹⁰ as part of three ‘guiding principles’ that Hoare had outlined for the war: no constitutional legislation in Parliament, no binding promises and a hard resolve to crush civil disobedience. Chamberlain and Linlithgow were of one mind, with the Viceroy stating that:

We framed the constitution as it stands in the Act of 1935 because we thought that way the best way – given the political position in both countries – of maintaining British influence in India. It is no part of our policy, I take it, to expedite in India constitutional change for its own sake, or gratuitously to hurry the handing over of the controls to Indian hands at any rate faster than that which we regard as best calculated, on the long view, to hold India to the Empire.¹¹¹¹

After the Viceroy declared War (without consultation) on India’s behalf, Congress withdrew co-operation with Government, demanding as they did so a Constituent Assembly to be part of Britain’s war aims as ‘the only way of determining the constitution of a free country’ and that it alone could solve ‘communal and other difficulties.’¹¹¹² Gandhi put the ‘Constituent Assembly’ to Linlithgow during their short talks, but it came to nothing¹¹¹³ At a joint meeting with the Viceroy at the end of 1939 it was becoming clear that while ‘Congress spokesmen

¹¹⁰⁸ Cripps, diary entry, 29.11.1939, MD, Bod./CP/Mss.9661/2.

¹¹⁰⁹ Cited in Carl Bridge, *Holding India*, 153.

¹¹¹⁰ Carl Bridge, *Holding India*, 152.

¹¹¹¹ Cited in Carl Bridge, *Holding India*, 153

¹¹¹² Cited in Nihal Gurmukh Singh ‘The Idea of a Constituent Assembly,’ *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 2:3 (1941), 255-272, 261

¹¹¹³ R.J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps and India*, 28

are trying to insist on a Constituent Assembly...the Muslim League will have none of it.’¹¹¹⁴ Jinnah now opposed it in much the same way as Ambedkar had done: as nothing more than ‘a second and larger edition of the Congress.’¹¹¹⁵ The Viceroy seized the opportunity, ‘pressing Jinnah to state the League’s “constructive policy” as a counterweight to the Congress’s demand for independence and a Constituent Assembly.’¹¹¹⁶ Jinnah did so, beginning the discussions within the Muslim League that would lead to the 1940 Lahore Resolution demanding a homeland for Indian Muslims. Soon after the Lahore resolution, Jinnah declared that if a Constituent Assembly was conceded, ‘it will mean the complete destruction of the Muslims.’ He pledged to fight ‘it tooth and nail *along with other minorities* [my emphasis].’¹¹¹⁷ It was around this time Ambedkar, Jinnah and Periyar explored the idea a joint movement to resist Congress.¹¹¹⁸ Although this did not amount to much, the intention reveals their politics (including the Pakistan demand) was to protest an idea that seemed so emancipatory in certain contexts, but to these representatives of religious, caste, geographic and linguistic difference, appeared only sinister.

In May 1940 Cripps showed the now detailed Goodfellows scheme – including the exact form and composition a Constituent Assembly might take and even the subheadings of a Treaty – to the new Secretary of State for India, Leopold Amery.¹¹¹⁹ Geostrategic interests were not completely absent, though they tended to only work on Conservatives: it took the German blitzkrieg into the Low Countries and France to get Amery to recommend the scheme to the Viceroy (conditional on minority agreement and hedged about with safeguards) but Linlithgow was immovable.¹¹²⁰ Amery’s early drafts of what would become the August

¹¹¹⁴ *Times of India*, 2.11.1939

¹¹¹⁵ *Times of India*, 9.12.1939

¹¹¹⁶ Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 49

¹¹¹⁷ Cited in Elangovan, “We the People,” 24.

¹¹¹⁸ Srinivasan Saraswathi, *Towards Self-Respect: Periyar EVR on a New World* (Madras: New Century Books House, 1994), 89-90.

¹¹¹⁹ R.J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps and India*, 31.

¹¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 32.

Offer ‘contemplated a post-war Constituent Assembly, and possibly a treaty’¹¹²¹ but Churchill, now Prime Minister, cut it down savagely and imposed the minority veto as it refused to concede ‘any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India’s national life.’¹¹²² Nevertheless, as R.J. Moore puts it, Cripps’s ideas (originally the India League’s) ‘lay behind the only constructive approaches that were made during the first two years of war.’¹¹²³ For Carl Bridge, ‘from the middle of 1940 the clash ceased to be between federationists and diehards and became one between advocates of the constituent assembly treaty solution and supporters of Churchillian obstinacy.’¹¹²⁴ The 1935 Act had been the result of nearly seven years of consultation and drafting, had only been implemented in 1937 and had clearly been intended to provide the constitutional framework for India for some time, far longer than the mere three years it took to be replaced by the India League’s anticolonial idea of a Constituent Assembly. For all that this might have alienated the Muslim League and others in India, this remains a remarkable anticolonial achievement.

Given Cripps’s association with the idea, it is unsurprising that it was the Mission that bore his name that made the Constituent Assembly an official policy. Nicholas Owen has attempted to read down any connection between Goodfellows and the Cripps Mission, tracing it instead to public reaction to the fall of Singapore.¹¹²⁵ For reasons of scope I do not engage with all his arguments save to note that the strongest evidence of a lineage is what was offered to India by the Cripps Mission ‘an elected body charged with the task of framing a new constitution for India’ based out of ‘newly elected provincial legislatures’ and with a treaty ‘covering all necessary matters relating to the complete transfer of responsibility from

¹¹²¹ Carl Bridge, *Holding India*, 154.

¹¹²² Cmd. 6219, 8. 8.1940, TP 1, 878.

¹¹²³ R.J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps and India*, 44.

¹¹²⁴ Carl Bridge, *Holding India*, 155.

¹¹²⁵ Nicholas Owen ‘The Cripps Mission of 1942: A Reinterpretation’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 30:1 (2002), 61-98.

British to Indian hands.’¹¹²⁶ There is nowhere else that such a distinctive and unprecedented policy set could have come from. After Indian independence Cripps would trace events back to Goodfellows, marvelling that two of the attendees were now Prime Ministers.¹¹²⁷ Attlee, who chaired the Cabinet’s India Committee, would recall that:

I had a good many stiff contests with Churchill on India. It was a great surprise when he embraced the idea of the Cripps Mission. The lines on which Cripps was empowered to go went beyond anything previously considered by any government. It embodied in fact some of the main ideas discussed by Cripps, Nehru and myself one weekend at Filkins [Goodfellows].¹¹²⁸

It is worth reading the origins of the Cripps Mission against decolonisation historiography, and particularly its analytical focus on the official mind. As Dane Kennedy has noted, most historians concerned with imperial outcomes are deeply attentive to John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson’s idea of the “Official Mind” pursuing ‘strategies to prevent, postpone, and manipulate the withdrawal from empire in such a way as to minimize its adverse effects on the country’s global standing.’¹¹²⁹ R.J. Moore, however, correctly noted that the Indian policy culminating in the Cripps Mission and resurrected by the Cabinet Mission was ‘a non-official initiative.’¹¹³⁰ If there was an ‘official mind’ at work between in 1942, it was clinically schizophrenic with the two personalities of anticolonial Labour and diehard, Churchillian, Conservative. Amery appears to be *actually* schizophrenic about India: variously appalled by Churchill’s eruptions and Labour’s concessions, but ultimately concerned with preserving some British power in India. Equally, the periodisation further problematizes the

¹¹²⁶ Draft Declaration for Discussion with Indian Leaders, 30.3.1942, TP 1, 565.

¹¹²⁷ Cripps to Nehru, 28.4.1949, TNA/CAB 127/143.

¹¹²⁸ Marginal notes in Clement Attlee, notes for an unpublished memoir, Churchill College, Cambridge/Churchill Archives Centre (Hereafter: CAC)/Attlee Papers/ATLE/1/13.

¹¹²⁹ Dane Kennedy, *The Imperial History Wars: Debating the British Empire* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 89.

¹¹³⁰ R.J. Moore ‘London’s India Policy’, 384.

historiography as we trace the all-important Cripps Mission not to the fall of Singapore, but to the Goodfellows agreement of 1938 and an India League campaign beginning at the Labour Party Conference in 1941.

While the initiative for Cabinet discussions on India came from Indian Liberals – Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru’s letter calling for a new departure¹¹³¹ – Labour Party pressure also played a key role. As early as December of 1941, Amery was confiding to his diary his annoyance that Attlee was acting under pressure from his party, which was ‘clamouring for a forward policy in India’ based on ‘an ill-informed sympathy with Congress.’¹¹³² This was largely the work of India League and the Quaker India Conciliation Group, led by a former Secretary of the India League, Agatha Harrison. The India League’s tactics had taken an interesting turn during the war. Congress’s rejection of the antifascist war and the India League’s rising alliance with the Communists had cost it a lot of support. It still had access to Parliament, however, and the party conferences where it could keep the Constituent Assembly idea alive. In 1939 Willie Gallacher MP, who was associated with both the Independent Labour Party, Communist Party and the India League,¹¹³³ asked in Parliament whether the Under-Secretary of State for India:

‘he has considered the statement of policy recently issued by the working committee of the Indian National Congress calling on the British Government to defend its claim to the title of defender of democracy by granting full democratic rights to the Indian people, including the right of self-determination and the granting of a constituent assembly; and what measures it is proposed to take to satisfy these demands?’

¹¹³¹ Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru to Sir Gilbert Laithwaite, 2.1.1932, TP 1, 3.

¹¹³² Amery, diary entry, 20.12.1941, *Amery Diaries*, 755.

¹¹³³ Gallacher attended League meetings in 1941, see ENSYR, 13.5.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/454 and served on its Executive Committee in 1944, see NMML/KMP/191.

David Grenfell, an India League stalwart, put the Congress position strongly in a House debate, noting that ‘it has been said that Congress has no right to protest against India being declared a belligerent without consultation. I think that it has a perfect right.’ Grenfell also noted that ‘we find that Congress condemns Nazi aggression in Poland and sympathises with those who resist it.’ Grenfell appealed to the House, that:

If Great Britain fights for the maintenance and extension of democracy, then she must necessarily end Imperialism in her own possessions and establish full democracy in India, and the Indian people must have the right of self-determination to frame their own constitution through a Constituent Assembly without external interference¹¹³⁴

A breakthrough came in 1940 when Labour’s former Secretary of State for India, Wedgwood Benn, spoke in the House of Commons and pledged Labour to summoning a Constituent Assembly after the war’s end.¹¹³⁵ Attlee privately informed Menon that the speech represented his own views.¹¹³⁶ Amery, however, felt that the ‘Constituent Assembly was an impossible demand’ because there was no body in India that can ‘speak for India or express an agreed demand.’ To counter Sorensen’s parliamentary demands for a Constituent Assembly, Amery responded that ‘the Moslem League is...opposed to the principle.’ In response, the India League turned the high liberalism of the Atlantic Charter against the Conservative invocation of the minority veto: In a pamphlet that attacked Churchill for excluding India from the Charter and called for an Assembly, Sorensen noted that ‘no conditions that internal unity and complete unanimity are a preliminary necessity’¹¹³⁷ to self-determination could be found in the Atlantic Charter.

¹¹³⁴ HC Deb 2.10.1939, vol 352 col 1706.

¹¹³⁵ HC Deb 18.4.1940, vol 359 col 1176.

¹¹³⁶ Though Menon was disappointed at the postwar timing. From a gist of intercepted telegrams from Menon to Nehru and Nehru to Menon enclosed in Governor-General of India to Secretary of State for India, 14.9.1940, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/453.

¹¹³⁷ Reginald Sorensen, *India and the Atlantic Charter* (India League Pamphlet, 1942), 9-12, see also HC Deb, 4.12.1941, vol 376 col 1257.

Amery's claims show that whatever the legitimacy of the Pakistani demand, to the India League in London it could mean nothing more than the minority veto. Menon began looking for ways to demonstrate Hindu-Muslim unity in the interests of Indian independence, and so turned to Hasrat Mohani. By the end of his life, Mohani would end his life having been a member of both Congress, the Muslim League and the Communist Party of India. He had articulated one of the first demands for Indian independence at a Muslim League session and coined the iconic slogan, *Inquilab Zindabad*. He would later resign from Jinnah's organisation over Partition and join the Constituent Assembly of India. The conflict and reconciliation between Menon and Mohani's position is revealing of the deep dilemma facing an anticolonial Muslim in Conservative-ruled Britain. In 1939, according to IPI, Menon was.

....anxious that Hasrat Mohani should publish a statement in the *Manchester Guardian* expressing his view that the minorities problem would be safe in the hands of Congress and that when a settlement between Congress and the Moslem League had been effected, the Moslem league would merge into the Congress. This Hasrat Mohani declined to do.... the discussion became extremely heated and according to one eyewitness almost resulted in a communal riot between the various supporters of either side...¹¹³⁸

Despite these deep tensions, Mohani realised that in the current political climate, the amplification of the Muslim League's demands would only frustrate Indian independence. He therefore put up a united front with the India League in Westminster, differing from Menon solely on the question of tribunician protections: 'the only different between the Moslem

¹¹³⁸ IPI to Silver, 1.11.1939, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

League and the Congress was...safeguards for minorities.'¹¹³⁹ Throughout the war, the India League kept up this line of attack: In 1942, Said Amir Shah, then an Indian League member, spoke at a public meeting where, like Nehru, he dismissed the Muslim League as 'an organisation of land and share holders' that 'in no way represented popular Muslim feeling' because 'the majority of the Moslems were behind the Indian National Congress.'¹¹⁴⁰ The Muslim League now moved to send deputations abroad, to counter 'allegations that the Muslims were reactionary and unpatriotic'¹¹⁴¹ and began lobbying the Labour Party with the Pakistan demand.¹¹⁴²

It was at the 1941 Labour Party Conference (long before the Japanese army was anywhere near the Straits of Johor) that the Cripps Mission really began. There 'were three powerful pro-Congress speeches from Labour MPs and candidates associated with the India League.'¹¹⁴³ Reginald Sorensen called for Labour to 'send from this Conference a message of assurance to India...that we want to see her free, as independent and as self-governed as any other country now languishing under Nazism.' He concluded that India 'shall be a free community with other free communities in the democratic world that shall yet be born.' Gordon MacDonald, in making his pitch, declared that 'the Moslem themselves are a very small minority in India and the Moslem League is only a part of the Moslems. On the other side is the Great Congress Party of India' and this 'represents the sentiments of India far better than any other section in India.' Tellingly, however, another speech held that, while Congress 'speaks more for India than the Moslem League...the Moslem League count more with the Tory Party and that is our trouble.' The great villain was Churchill's 'retrogressive' and 'reactionary,' government. MacDonald also appealed to the National Council of Labour

¹¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁴⁰ ENSYR, 14.10.1942, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

¹¹⁴¹ R.J. Moore, 'Jinnah and the Pakistan Demand', *Modern Asian Studies*, 17:4 (1983), 529-561, 539.

¹¹⁴² IPI to Silver, 3.11.1941, BL/IOR/L/PJ/453.

¹¹⁴³ Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism*, 268.

to take an initiative on India, no doubt with Attlee in mind. The Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party undertook to take the issue to the Council.¹¹⁴⁴ In October of 1941 Harold Laski suggested to the Joint Committee of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the National Executive that a Minister should take the Goodfellows ideas to India.¹¹⁴⁵ In due course, the Committee recommended that ‘a representative should be sent out to India without delay to negotiate with the Indian leaders.’¹¹⁴⁶ Over January of 1942 the National Council of Labour ‘expressed its anxiety’ over India and India ‘continued to be debated by sub-committees and the advisory committee – an indication of the disquiet within the ranks of the leadership.’¹¹⁴⁷ As he battled Churchill in Cabinet, Attlee reassured ‘an anxious Labour NEC as well as the National Council of Labour that steps were being taken’¹¹⁴⁸ but the demands would not go away. Reginald Sorensen was now openly arguing that ‘the Labour Party wanted Cripps...to go to India with powers to effect a settlement’¹¹⁴⁹ and calling for an Indian Constituent Assembly in the House of Commons, because ‘numerous Hindu, Moslem and other bodies, including Congress’¹¹⁵⁰ supported it. Sorensen was supported by other India Leaguers: S.O. Davies spoke forcefully on India during a major parliamentary debate on the progress of the war, asking whether Britain was fighting for ‘liberation’ or that Britons were to ‘fight and die for the extension of fascism’¹¹⁵¹ in India.

After Goodfellows, Nehru had pressed the Constituent Assembly idea on the Quaker-led India Conciliation Group (ICG).¹¹⁵² This included Carl Heath, who was connected to the India League through its committee of Churchmen. This, notably, included Father Groser, who had

¹¹⁴⁴ LP/RAC, 1941.

¹¹⁴⁵ PHM/LPA/ID/IND/1/41 and PHM/LPA/ID/INDID/IND/1/50.

¹¹⁴⁶ Labour Party, National Executive Committee, Draft Memorandum on India, 29.1.1942, PHM/LPA/ID/IND/1/49.

¹¹⁴⁷ Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism*, 269.

¹¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 270.

¹¹⁴⁹ R.J. Moore, *Churchill Cripps and India*, 55.

¹¹⁵⁰ HC Deb 4.12.1941, vol 376 col 1256.

¹¹⁵¹ HC Deb 27.1.1942, vol. 377 col. 688.

¹¹⁵² R.J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps and India*, 5.

helped organise the antifascist resistance at Cable Street,¹¹⁵³ allowing the Spanish Universality to live on in the India League's appeal to the dissenting Churches. By the end of 1941 Agatha Harrison and the ICG had started a whispering campaign for Cripps to go to India, beginning with an overture to Isobel Cripps.¹¹⁵⁴ A month later Heath and Harrison were persuading Cripps directly that he was the man to go to India and achieve a settlement because 'men like Nehru would have special reason for trusting you.'¹¹⁵⁵ India Leaguers joined in, with Lord Farringdon demanding from the House of Lords that 'His Majesty's Government should send out to India some person—and I would say definitely a person rather than a Commission—who can negotiate with the Indian leaders.' He clearly meant Cripps as 'evidently such a person must necessarily be someone with whom the Indian leaders will negotiate.'

Farringdon also called for the Indianisation of the entire Executive Council, 'whose duty it would be to call a Constituent Assembly for India.'¹¹⁵⁶ Sir David Monteth, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for India and Burma, noted the 'curious coincidence'¹¹⁵⁷ between Lord Farringdon's intervention in the Lords and the appearance of Attlee's memorandum for the War Cabinet, which demanded that 'a representative with power to negotiate within wide limits should be sent to India now, either as a special envoy or in replacement of the present Viceroy.'¹¹⁵⁸ This followed an earlier letter to Amery which had disparaged Linlithgow's 'crude imperialism' and asked whether 'it is worth considering whether someone should not be charged with a mission to try to bring the political leaders together.'¹¹⁵⁹

When Cripps entered the War Cabinet, his political stock was riding high after he was credited (wrongly) with bringing the USSR into the war. He immediately began pressing the

¹¹⁵³ ENSYR, 29.9.1943, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455.

¹¹⁵⁴ Agatha Harrison to Isobel Cripps, 15.12.1942, Friends House Library, India Conciliation Group Papers, Temp.Mss.47/1 (hereafter, FHL/ICG).

¹¹⁵⁵ Carl Heath to Cripps, 26.1.1942, FHL/ICG/Temp.Mss.47/1.

¹¹⁵⁶ HL Deb, 3.2.1942, vol 121 col 589.

¹¹⁵⁷ Minute by Sir D. Monteth, 4.2.1942, TP 1, 115.

¹¹⁵⁸ The Indian Situation: Memorandum by the Lord Privy Seal, 2.2.1942, TP 1, 110.

¹¹⁵⁹ Attlee to Amery, 24.1.1942, TP 1, 75.

Goodfellows scheme on the Prime Minister.¹¹⁶⁰ The presence of Cripps (and India League pressure through the wider Labour party) appears crucial as Attlee had not been putting up much of a fight against Churchill on his own. Amery even complained about the lack of support from Attlee against Churchill, whose extremism troubled even this student of Chamberlain and Milner.¹¹⁶¹ As soon as he heard the details of the War Cabinet reshuffle, however, he realised that 'I shall now have to face a determined attempt by Cripps and Attlee to find some immediate Indian solution with a Congress bias to it.'¹¹⁶² Now, no longer one of Amery's 'Labour mice...behind Cripps Attlee is a perfect lion brow-beating me on any point of moderation I try to raise.'¹¹⁶³

Churchill's own views remained atavistic: he hoped that 'my colleagues will realize the danger of...making Constitutional changes...when enemy is upon the frontier...the Indian troops are fighting splendidly, but it must be remembered that their allegiance is to the King Emperor, and that the rule of the Congress and Hindoo Priesthood machine would never be tolerated by a fighting race.' Attlee's reply was that 'his Labour colleagues would find themselves in great difficulty'¹¹⁶⁴ because of pressure from their party in Parliament. Thus, the India League appears crucial to tilting Cabinet arguments in India's favour. Amery spent the war complaining to anyone that would listen, including the Viceroy¹¹⁶⁵ and the King,¹¹⁶⁶ about the pressure that Attlee and Cripps were bringing on the Government for a concession and the unbearable pressure that their own party was placing on them. In 1942 Attlee took advantage of Churchill's distraction over Russia and held seven meetings of the India Committee in eleven days.'¹¹⁶⁷ It produced a draft that offered India unconditional

¹¹⁶⁰ Cripps to Churchill, 24.1.1942, TNA/PREM4/45/7.

¹¹⁶¹ Amery, diary entry, 20.12.1941, *Amery Diaries*, 755.

¹¹⁶² Amery, diary entry, 19.2.1942, *Amery Diaries*, 777.

¹¹⁶³ Amery, diary entry, 1.3.1942, *Amery Diaries*, 781.

¹¹⁶⁴ R.J. Moore, *Churchill Cripps and India*, 51.

¹¹⁶⁵ Amery to Linlithgow, 10.3.1942, TP 1, 404.

¹¹⁶⁶ Amery, diary entry, 4.3.1944, *Amery Diaries*, 783.

¹¹⁶⁷ John Bew, *Citizen Clem*, 285.

independence within the Commonwealth, but this was blocked by the wider Cabinet. Amery promptly appealed to Churchill and Simon to counteract Attlee and Cripps.¹¹⁶⁸ Under Attlee's chairmanship, nevertheless, Cripps's proposals – which was largely based on his elaboration of the Goodfellows agreement during his 1939 discussions in India¹¹⁶⁹ – became the basis, rather than Amery's, of Cabinet policy.¹¹⁷⁰ Cripps' draft called for an 'elected body charged with the task of framing a new constitution for India' based out of 'newly elected provincial legislatures' and with a treaty to 'covering all necessary matters relating to the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands.'¹¹⁷¹ The Goodfellows agreement, including the Constituent Assembly, was now policy.

A meeting of the wider Cabinet showed, however, that the new policy 'dismayed many Conservatives' and a 'meeting of all Conservative MPs gave Amery a rough ride, clearly believing that government policy had been captured by its left wing members.'¹¹⁷² Linlithgow was equally incensed and threatened to resign his Viceroyalty which Amery feared would tip Indian policy into 'acute party conflict'¹¹⁷³ and even break up the government. Between 'Conservative reaction, i.e. the view that some British interest must be retained in India'¹¹⁷⁴ and threats to resign by the Viceroy on one hand, and Cripps from the War Cabinet on the other, it was Cripps's offer to go himself that saved both the situation.¹¹⁷⁵ Both the Viceroy and Amery opposed Cripps going and Amery believed that 'The Moslems regard Cripps as an out and out Congress man'¹¹⁷⁶ and his Mission would give a 'fit' to 'both the Moslems in India and the Tories here.'¹¹⁷⁷

¹¹⁶⁸ R.J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps and India*, 66.

¹¹⁶⁹ Memorandum, n.d., FHL/ICG/Temp.Mss.47/1.

¹¹⁷⁰ Amery, diary entry, 28.2.1942, *Amery Diaries*, 780.

¹¹⁷¹ Draft Declaration for Discussion with Indian Leaders, 30.3.1942, TP 1, 565.

¹¹⁷² Peter Clarke, *The Cripps Version*, 285.

¹¹⁷³ Amery to Linlithgow, 10.3.1942, TP 1, 404.

¹¹⁷⁴ R.J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps and India*, 72.

¹¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 74.

¹¹⁷⁶ Amery, diary entry, 7.3.1942, *Amery Diaries*, 784.

¹¹⁷⁷ Amery, diary entry, 8.3.1941, *Amery Diaries*, 785.

Churchill only supported the Cripps Mission because he believed that ‘it wouldn’t matter very much if the scheme fell through’¹¹⁷⁸ while Amery’s view was that it would placate ‘Americans and the Left Wing here.’ Amery believed that Congress hoped that ‘its influence with the members of the Left Wing here and in America would push us into going back on the pledge of 1940.’ Amery expected Cripps to put forward an ‘essentially Conservative policy, both as regards the future and as regards the immediate refusal to transfer control of the Executive’¹¹⁷⁹ and noted the muted response from the Labour benches to the Cripps Mission ‘silent as if they suspected that their Left Wing champion was being used for Tory purposes.’¹¹⁸⁰ The official mind was clearly not in good state of mental health. To mix a metaphor, British policy towards India was less an emanation of an official mind as the product of cats fighting in a bag.

The compromise between Labour and Conservative changed the Goodfellows agreement in two ways: it (understandably, perhaps) retained the defence portfolio in British hands and ‘despite Attlee’s objections to “bidding the devil good morning,” Amery got the Cabinet to agree to the Pakistan option for Indian Muslims.’¹¹⁸¹ This must be seen in the proper context: Originally, Zetland had only agreed to forward the Goodfellows formula on the grounds that ‘to defy Indians to make their own constitution, let alone a treaty, would demonstrate India’s disunity to the world and make it “abundantly clear” that Britain would have to remain to keep the peace.’¹¹⁸² Amery echoed Zetland’s views, writing that India contained ‘two great communities, as separate and indeed as antagonistic, in culture and outlook as any of the

¹¹⁷⁸ Amery, diary entry, 6.2.1942, manuscript diary, CAC/Leopold Amery Papers/Amel7/36.

¹¹⁷⁹ Amery to Linlithgow 10.3.1942, TP 1, 401 and William Roger Louis, *In the Name of God, Go!: Leo Amery and the British Empire in the age of Churchill* (New York: Norton, 1992), 152.

¹¹⁸⁰ Amery, diary entry, 11.3.1942 *Amery Diaries*, 787.

¹¹⁸¹ Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism*, 270.

¹¹⁸² Carl Bridge, *Holding India*, 152.

leading nations in Europe.’¹¹⁸³ Privately, he had reassured the Viceroy that ‘we are not going to make a deal with Congress behind the backs of the minorities.’¹¹⁸⁴ His real intentions behind permitting the Pakistan demand were also conveyed to Delhi:

As regards the plan, the more I think of it the more probable it seems to me that in some form or other the Viceroy will have to remain, not merely as constitutional Governor-General, but as representative of broader imperial aspects of government, for a good long time to come, and to be equipped with the instruments of power required to carry out his functions. After all, supposing that Pakistan does come off, there will be possibly two Muslim areas, the whole of the States, Hindu British India (if that does not divide itself up!) and finally at least one important primitive hill tribe area...it is obviously absurd to think that each of these is going to have its own air force and navy or even its own mechanised ground forces on any scale that is going to be of use for the defence of India. There will therefore have to be someone, in the absence of a central self-governing federal scheme, to take control of these matters, and that someone will have to have at any rate a certain number of cantonments, aerodromes and ports with probably a central reserve area of his own...you had better keep in mind the desirability of retaining Delhi and a considerable area around it as the ultimate federal territory of an eventually united India, and not it pass into the hands of any one of the “dominions” that may temporarily emerge out of the first experiment in constitution framing.¹¹⁸⁵

Amery therefore followed Craddock in defending the British *Raj* by providing political space for Pakistan to happen, a territorialisation of the Conservative minority veto. After the war

¹¹⁸³ Cited in T.G. Fraser, *Partition in India and Palestine*, (London: Macmillan, 1984), 85.

¹¹⁸⁴ Amery to Linlithgow, 23.10.1940, Linlithgow Papers, BL/Mss.Eur. F125/9.

¹¹⁸⁵ Amery to Linlithgow, 24.3.1942, TP 1, 469.

Amery would write to Churchill stating that he had not ‘considered the possibility of an Indian Constituent Assembly being invited to declare for or against separation before the constitution had been accepted by here,’¹¹⁸⁶ a very different interpretation from that held by Labour. As for Cripps, when Agatha Harrison stressed the ‘danger of the contracting out of the provinces – that it admitted the Pakistan idea’ Cripps defended it, stating that it would force Congress to ‘go all out to see there was accommodation.’¹¹⁸⁷ For Cripps, therefore, Pakistan was a chip that could be bargained for Congress accommodating minorities within the Constituent Assembly. This was a desperately risky bet that Congress would offer tribunician concessions within the Assembly to head off secession.

R.J. Moore has surveyed, in great detail, the collapse of negotiations in 1942 which need no detailed revisiting here, save to note his emphasis on the Linlithgow-Churchill axis in wrecking the proposals, including the Viceroy’s unwillingness to operate his Executive Council as a Cabinet.¹¹⁸⁸ This view is confirmed by Johannes Voigt, who points out that the Viceroy ‘put a spoke in the wheel of negotiations before the Working Committee of Congress had formed an opinion on the current state of proposals.’¹¹⁸⁹ Cripps certainly exceeded his brief in his zeal to conciliate Congress over the question of defence and Cabinet-like government and then Churchill brought the proposals back to their original formulation. Taken with the ‘Pakistan option’ it is unsurprising that Congress rejected them. Labour might have been puzzled at why Congress rejected postwar independence over short-term questions, but Congress had been stung before. The party had been promised Dominion status by Irwin only to have the Tories snatch it away again, and the most uncompromising diehard from the 1930s now living on Downing Street. They were right to be suspicious: in his cable which

¹¹⁸⁶ Amery to Churchill, 19.12.1946, CAC/Churchill Papers (hereafter, WSC), CHUR/2/43A-B.

¹¹⁸⁷ Agatha Harrison to Horace Alexander, Carl Heath and Alexander Wilson, 28.2.1942, FHL/ICG/Temp.Mss.47/1.

¹¹⁸⁸ R.J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps and India* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1979).

¹¹⁸⁹ Johannes Voigt, ‘Co-operation or Confrontation? War and Congress Politics, 1939-42, *Congress and the Raj*, 365.

nixed the mission, Churchill set out his vision for it: ‘there were not to be negotiations’ but only a performance: Cripps was to ‘gain acceptance with possibly minor variations or elaborations of our great offer which has made so powerful an impression here and throughout the United States.’¹¹⁹⁰ Nehru noticed the volte-face and believed that ‘the person who was most responsible for what happened in Delhi in 1942 was Churchill.’¹¹⁹¹ Years later Churchill admitted in Parliament to undermining Cripps:

‘...whose ability has been devoted with such disastrous effects to furthering the whole of this policy [Indian independence]

Hon. Members: Dirty

Mr. Sorensen: Shame

Churchill: I remember well when the right hon. And learned Gentleman went out as representative of the Government of which I was the head, and how we had to pull him up – [interruption] – I do not want to say anything –

Sir S. Cripps: If the right hon. Gentleman intends to disclose what passed between me and the Cabinet on that occasion, I hope he will disclose it all

Mr Churchill: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is quite right in what he says, and I shall not pursue the point [Laughter.]¹¹⁹²

¹¹⁹⁰ Churchill to Cripps, 10.4.1942, TP 1, 581.

¹¹⁹¹ Nehru to Menon 3.9.1945, SWJN 14, 81.

¹¹⁹² HC Deb, 12.12.1946, vol. 431 col. 1368.

Over two decades, therefore, Conservatives derailed Labour initiatives towards political freedom for India. They delayed dominionhood and independence by making space available for Pakistan and eventually, therefore, the horrors of Partition. British policy towards India was not a rational, official response to wartime strategy, capacity or political realities in India, but the muddled product of a conflict between powerful diehard imperialist and anticolonial impulses.

If the Cripps Mission nevertheless made a Constituent Assembly a realisable prospect for India. This arose because of the anticolonial agency of Congress in India and the India League among Labour, as well as the League's powerful ally within British governing circles and the state, Stafford Cripps. The India League's role in steering British government policy is important because it reveals *how the Cripps Mission would have appeared to the Muslim League*. It must have appeared disorientating and threatening for Linlithgow to encourage Jinnah to devise an alternative to Congress's core demand for a Constituent Assembly in 1940, only for Congress's friend, Cripps, to offer one in 1942. Cripps must have been aware of this: he had deliberately avoided using the term 'Constituent Assembly' in his draft declaration lest it 'put the Moslems in defiance.'¹¹⁹³ His ruse fooled nobody. To the Muslim League, Churchill's Government was doing Congress's bidding: Its Working Committee criticised the Mission for having 'virtually conceded the Congress demands of the right of secession from the British Commonwealth of Nations and the forming of a Constituent Assembly with a preponderately Hindu majority for the framing of a post-war Constitution.'¹¹⁹⁴ As the Cripps Mission was rejected over short-term questions it prevented the resolution of the longer-term incompatibility between tribunician protections and a fully sovereign Constituent Assembly. Congress saved the Muslim League from being the ones to

¹¹⁹³ Agatha Harrison to Horace Alexander, Heath and Alexander Wilson 28.2.1942 FHL/ICG/ Temp.Mss.47/1.

¹¹⁹⁴ All-India Muslim League Meeting, 16-20.8.1942, FP 2, 397.

reject the Cripps Mission, but Jinnah nevertheless laid bare how an Assembly elected by all the provinces and operating on a majority vote would be entirely bent to the will of Congress.¹¹⁹⁵ In a presidential address to the Muslim League, Jinnah lamented that because of ‘the rule of bare majority...Mr. Gandhi will come in to this Constitution-making body with a dead certainty of getting a Constitution which will emerge for an All-India Union.’¹¹⁹⁶

The failure of the Cripps Mission and Congress’s resulting campaign of Civil Disobedience began three years of bitter estrangement between Labour and Congress, between the Labour leadership and the India League and even led to difficulties between the League and Congress. Menon now knew that his ‘business was to put over the idea that passive resistance if it started in India was not an anti-war movement but a movement in order to enable the people to get the power to carry assistance in the war.’¹¹⁹⁷ This was impossible and IPI had reason to believe that ‘Menon’s private views’ were that he had ‘no faith in Gandhi and is against civil disobedience,’¹¹⁹⁸ even though Gandhi did call for a Constituent Assembly as he launched the Quit India Movement.¹¹⁹⁹ There was also a ‘strong conservative reaction in British policy towards India’ and as Low puts it ‘Congress leaders rightly sensed that the wartime emergency was being used by some of Britain’s Conservative leaders to cloud their profound reluctance to transfer power to Congress at the all-India level.’¹²⁰⁰ There was little to hope for from Labour either: Cripps was dumped from the War Cabinet and, with Churchill in the USA, it was Attlee who had ordered the interning of Congress’s leaders. The official party line was that Indian freedom now depended on allied victory, and that civil disobedience had to be abandoned for negotiations to be resumed. The internment of

¹¹⁹⁵ Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 80.

¹¹⁹⁶ Twenty-Ninth Session of the All-India Muslim League, 3-6.4.1942, FP 2 387.

¹¹⁹⁷ Telephone Check, 6.7.1942, TNA/MI5/KV/2/2510.

¹¹⁹⁸ IPI to Silver, 16.7.42, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/450.

¹¹⁹⁹ FIC 1, 133

¹²⁰⁰ D.A. Low ‘Introduction’, *Congress and the Raj*, 31.

Congress leaders was, therefore, a ‘timely and unavoidable precaution.’¹²⁰¹ More broadly, Attlee did not support interim measures that would afford power without accountability, stating that ‘he was frankly horrified at the thought of the substitution for the present government of a brown oligarchy subject to no control either from Parliament or the electorate.’¹²⁰²

After addressing some MPs (a few of which remained sympathetic), Sorensen met with Attlee, Bevin and Cripps, who told him that they supported the government’s approach, with even Cripps himself saying that ‘since it was now a case of open war between India and Britain...nothing more could be said.’¹²⁰³ In private, Cripps was a bit more flexible: asking William Cove, a Labour MP and India Leaguer if ‘he could not get ‘our Congress friends’ to disavow civil disobedience, because if they did so, that might open the way to negotiations. Cove approached Menon as the best interlocutor, but Menon replied that he could not get in touch with his Congress friends because ‘they were all in prison.’¹²⁰⁴ The India League even found itself considering the reform of its constitution to remove any ‘impression that the League in any sense an organ of Congress’ to mitigate the risk of being declared a ‘proscribed organisation.’¹²⁰⁵

Labour in Power: Independence and Partition, 1945-1947

As the war wore on, little changed: in 1943 an old friend of the League, James Middleton informed the League that ‘there was no action that could be taken from the British side.’¹²⁰⁶

The India League failed to shift the 1943 Party Conference from its line that civil

¹²⁰¹ Attlee to Churchill, 13.8.1942, TP 2, 686.

¹²⁰² Attlee to Cabinet India Committee, 27.3.1944, TP 5, 345.

¹²⁰³ IPI to Silver, 8.9.1942, BL/IOR/PJ/454.

¹²⁰⁴ IPI to Silver, 17.10.42, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

¹²⁰⁵ IPI to Silver 8.9.1942 BL/IOR/PJ/454.

¹²⁰⁶ IL/EC, 3.2.1943, NMML/KMP/176.

disobedience had to be called off before negotiations could resume.¹²⁰⁷ There were few glimmers: The Earl of Huntingdon's book, *Commonsense about India*, called for 'an elected Constituent Assembly' to 'finally determine the Constitution of India.'¹²⁰⁸ Four India League members led an important parliamentary Labour Party meeting in 1943 which called for a new Viceroy, an Indian defence member and a constitutional convention, thus keeping the policy alive and fixing Churchill's wrecking of the Cripps Mission, at least in theory.¹²⁰⁹ More importantly, the Labour Party Conference that the India League had so spectacularly swayed in alliance with the NUR, FBU and other trades unions in 1944 to follow the Congress line, over the official Labour one, that a free India would be a victory in the fight against fascism, included a report by the International Department which called for a Constituent Assembly as a means towards achieving an independent India.¹²¹⁰

As the war ended and the wartime coalition broke up, light began emerging for the India League. Menon saw Cripps and was then able to reassure Nehru that 'Cripps believes...that his ideas on India will become party policy.' There was now real hope as Attlee, finally, 'has shown himself to be a greater man than he hitherto appeared to be.'¹²¹¹ Even before the votes had been counted in Britain, Cripps issued a statement calling for a Constituent Assembly to be based upon the Cripps Proposals¹²¹² and therefore, eventually, Goodfellows. After the 1945 election, the India League's now massive parliamentary committee began clamouring for an Assembly to be summoned.¹²¹³ The League was able to issue a letter with the signatures of fifty-two MPs that demanded, among other concessions, a Constituent Assembly for India.¹²¹⁴

An open letter, calling for a Constituent Assembly was circulated to the British press, signed

¹²⁰⁷ LP/RAC, 1943.

¹²⁰⁸ Lord Hastings, *Commonsense about India*, 63.

¹²⁰⁹ PA/RSP/Sor/42A.

¹²¹⁰ LP/RAC, 1944.

¹²¹¹ Menon to Nehru 2.8.1945 cited in Ramesh, *Chequered Brilliance*, 360.

¹²¹² See footnote, TP 6, 21.

¹²¹³ See NMML/KMP/191.

¹²¹⁴ See NMML/KMP/191.

by the a vast array of figures associated with the India League, including Sorensen, Horace Alexander, Carl Heath, Lord Faringdon and Edward Thompson and issued in the name of the League's chairman, William Dobbie, of the National Union of Railwaymen.¹²¹⁵

As was mentioned in first chapter, Michael Foot would hail the India League's 'important role in changing Labour opinion by the end of the war'¹²¹⁶ and Attlee himself noted that any attempt to reassert British rule in India would be impossible partly because 'public opinion especially in our party would not stand for it.'¹²¹⁷ Wavell's impression of both Attlee and Cripps was that they were calling a Constituent Assembly for India so that they could placate 'opinion in their own party.' When Wavell warned that the Cripps proposals would not be accepted by all parties and objected to a 'Constitution Making Body,' Cripps corrected him, stating that Shiva Rao had already informed him that Congress found it acceptable. Wavell grumbled that 'Congress propagandists' were 'seeing Cripps and Attlee, and they are taking all they say as gospel'¹²¹⁸ and concluded Labour 'are obviously bent on handing over India to their Congress friends as soon as possible' due to their 'pledges to the party tail and fear of their pressure'¹²¹⁹ by which he would have meant the India League's parliamentary committee of over one hundred Labour MPs. In September, the Viceroy's objections to a 'Constitution-Making body' were overruled by the Cabinet, desiring one 'as envisaged in the Cripps offer of 1942.'¹²²⁰ Wavell contemplated resigning, refusing 'to be a party to their plans to Quit India.'¹²²¹ Wavell did as he was bid, however, and announced elections, the resumption of negotiations based off the 1942 proposals and 'the intention of His Majesty's Government to convene as soon as possible a Constitution-making Body.'¹²²² This would become one of the

¹²¹⁵ Mr Dobbie and Others to Newspaper Editors, 6.9.1945, TP 11, 220.

¹²¹⁶ Janaki Ram, *V.K. Krishna Menon*, 69.

¹²¹⁷ 'Notes by the Prime Minister,' (n.d., likely 12.11.1946), TP, 9, 68.

¹²¹⁸ Wavell, diary entry, 3.9.1945, *Wavell Journal*, 169.

¹²¹⁹ Wavell, diary entry, 4.9.1945, *Wavell Journal* 169-170.

¹²²⁰ Cabinet Minutes, 11.9.1945, TP 11, 247.

¹²²¹ Wavell, diary entry, 4.9.1945, *Wavell Journal*, 170.

¹²²² Broadcast Speech by Wavell at New Delhi, 19.9.1945, TP 6, 282.

key proposals of the Cabinet Mission which was planned three weeks *before* the Bombay Mutiny, to which it might be mistakenly attributed, and fulfilling Cripps's plan for it that he devised during his 1939 trip to India.¹²²³

The Constituent Assembly was duly announced, with the support of 'both the Viceroy and the full Cabinet'¹²²⁴ alongside a parliamentary delegation to India, which included Sorensen (now Chair of the India League's parliamentary committee and the Labour Party's India Committee¹²²⁵) to India that the India League had been campaigning for, inspired by the 1932 delegation that first suggested the idea.¹²²⁶ Upon his return Sorensen held, unconvincingly, that 'recent elections mean that the Muslim League did not represent all Indian Muslims'¹²²⁷ and the India League began openly attacking the idea of Pakistan in the pages of its newspaper, *Newsindia*.¹²²⁸ Both the India League and Attlee were now finding ways of dissolving the minority veto, with Attlee stating in parliament:

I am well aware, when I speak of India, that I speak of a country containing a congeries of races, religions and languages, and I know well all the difficulties thereby created. But those difficulties can only be overcome by Indians. We are very mindful of the rights of minorities and minorities should be able to live free from fear. On the other hand, we cannot allow a minority to place a veto on the advance of the majority.¹²²⁹

¹²²³ Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism*, 294.

¹²²⁴ R.J. Moore, *Escape from Empire*, 40.

¹²²⁵ Pethick-Lawrence to Mr Morrison, 11.11.45, TP 6, 473.

¹²²⁶ IPI to Silver, 22.9.1945, BL/IOR/L/PJ/456.

¹²²⁷ ENSYR, 12.3.1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

¹²²⁸ IPI to Silver, 20.12.1945, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/456.

¹²²⁹ HC Deb, 15.3.1946, vol. 420 col. 1422.

The Muslim League would, therefore, face pressure from every direction to join the Constituent Assembly. Congress support for the institution was now fever-pitch: Gandhi even supporting it as a constructive and revolutionary ‘substitute for *Satyagraha*.’¹²³⁰ Nehru made reassuring noises that the Assembly would ‘not overlook the interests of the minorities.’¹²³¹ Surprisingly, the Viceroy made Nehru’s point for him as he attempted to reassure Jinnah that he would not face a Congress majority, but a majority of ‘reasonable men’ and that Congress could never make a constitution for the whole of India without the Muslim League. Jinnah was unmoved and warned Pethick-Lawrence that ‘the idea of a single Constitution-making body is fundamentally opposed to the basic principles that the Muslim League has declared times out of number.’¹²³²

Yet Labour would not budge on achieving Indian independence through a Constituent Assembly. The *Manchester Guardian* praised Attlee’s ‘creative zeal’¹²³³ over India while Alan Campbell-Johnson noted that, on the question of India, Attlee had a ‘spiritual integrity’ and burned with ‘a hidden fire.’¹²³⁴ In a very real sense, the Constituent Assembly was a great compliment from Labour: rather the Tory vision of an India of irreconcilable communities, Labour’s convening of a Constituent Assembly expressed a belief that reconciliation could be effected in a liberal, rational, agonistic institution. This is commensurate with Labour’s own history: the belief that the interests and security of the working-class could be secured by participation in a formalisation of agonistic liberalism, namely parliamentary democracy, as opposed to revolution. Demographic heft would convert working-class from plebs to *demos* or at least allow Labour to serve as their effective tribune. This was not available to Jinnah.

The 1937 elections had shown that nothing could convert the Muslim minority from plebs to

¹²³⁰ Cited in Alok Bajpai, ‘Satyagraha and Duragraha: Some Reflections,’ *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 68 (2007), 883-888, 887.

¹²³¹ *Times of India*, 3.8.1946.

¹²³² Jinnah to Pethick Lawrence, 9.2.1946, cited in Ayesha Jalal, *Sole Spokesman*, 176.

¹²³³ John Bew, *Citizen Clem*, 440.

¹²³⁴ Cited in John Bew, *Citizen Clem*, 442.

demos, and the experience of government under the 1935 Act underscored the consequences of a lack of tribunical protection. With Nehru, some might wish that the supporters of the Muslim League saw themselves, for the purpose of politics, as exclusively Indian and chose an agonistic politics where economic questions and minority rights were the subject of reasoned debate, rather than the antagonism of irreconcilable group identity. It is easy, however, to support transparent liberalism if it tacitly conforms to one's identity and confirms one's power. For Tavia Nyong'O, there is a problem with the 'continued liberal enchantment with a "transparent" subject, unmarked by exterior signs of racial or sexual difference.'¹²³⁵ Linda Alcoff argues that the 'reality of racial categories within our current social ontology' alongside a universalising liberalism that nonetheless 'trivializes difference' is 'one of the greatest antimonies of modern discourse.'¹²³⁶ Radical feminists and antiracists are less enchanted with the Cartesian politics of agonistic and ostensibly 'transparent' liberalism that trivializes their difference and social experience, and the same was true of the Muslim League. Moreover, the enduring contradiction between liberal imperialism and British colonial governmentality means that politics and constitutional progress in India was premised not upon the politics of an agonistic liberalism built upon citizenship, but agreement between bounded and inevitable groups in closed imperial forums. This was even true of relatively liberal colonial institutions, thanks to the politics of franchises and weighting: colonial representation was less about citizenship than the amount of difference in the room. It was impossible for the Constituent Assembly to erase this history overnight. In any case, Congress had refused to share power with the Muslim League, squashed its amendments and made it quite clear that the Assembly was intended to do two things: draft a constitution and solve the communal problem, which was both an anticolonial dissolution of the minority veto and a terrifying elision for the Muslim League. Thus, the Constituent Assembly offered the

¹²³⁵ Tavia Nyong'O, 'Little Monsters: Race, Sovereignty and Queer Inhumanism in Beasts of the Southern Wild', *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 21 (2015), 249-272, 266.

¹²³⁶ Linda Martin Alcoff. 'Philosophy and racial identity' *Radical Philosophy*, 75 (1996), 5-14, 6.

Muslim League not the agonistic politics of ‘reasonable men’ but something else: Jinnah told Pethick-Lawrence that the Muslim League would not join it as they were not willing to ‘be submerged in a Hindu nation.’¹²³⁷

Reading Jinnah’s negotiating positions in 1946-7 against his long opposition to a Constituent Assembly reveals a clear consistency to his aims. These were entirely in line with the founding impulse of the Muslim League: to mitigate the social impact upon India’s Muslims of their emerging position of political minority (as demonstrated in the developing regime of liberal, representative institutions) by improvising tribunician protections. It may even be that the territorialisation of this aim, the Pakistan demand, was an instrumentality: the only tribunicial protection left as India moved towards the vanishing point of a unitary state with all power concentrated in a Constituent Assembly. During the Cabinet Mission days Jinnah still supported a united India if it had a ‘thin executive’¹²³⁸ and correspondingly powerful provinces. The Cabinet Mission attempted to provide an approximation of this demand through the Cabinet Mission plan, but it failed to sufficiently protect this plan from the sovereign, Congress-dominated Constituent Assembly. On June 6 the Muslim League’s Working Committee accepted the Cabinet Mission plan by a large majority but then Nehru declared that ‘the greatest merit of the Constituent Assembly was that the British government will have nothing to do with it after it had been set in motion. The Constituent Assembly then will be completely sovereign and will be able to do anything.’¹²³⁹ The irony of the Constituent Assembly idea is that Nehru’s demonstration of its truly liberal and anticolonial quality (the dissolution of the minority veto *and* the rule of colonial difference) was also the point at which Partition became inevitable. As Maulana Azad recalled it, Nehru stated that Congress

¹²³⁷ R.J. Moore, ‘Jinnah and the Pakistan Demand’, 557

¹²³⁸ Ayesha Jalal, *Sole Spokesman*, 179.

¹²³⁹ Cited in Sangam Lal, ‘The Muslim League and the Constituent Assembly of India,’ *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 42 (1981), 495-502, 496.

would enter the Constituent Assembly ‘completely unfettered by agreements’ and that ‘regarded itself free to change or modify the Cabinet Mission Plan as it sought best’ To Jinnah ‘this would mean that minorities would be placed at the mercy of the majority.’¹²⁴⁰ Nehru’s real mistake was to simply blurt out Congress’s intentions all along: Gandhi had been content with the Cabinet Mission plan but was at pains to find out ‘whether the procedure laid down for the Constituent Assembly was subject to alteration’ and, *crucially*, ‘whether it was open to Congress representatives in the Constituent Assembly at the opening meeting to deal with procedure to raise the question whether the Assembly should in fact divide into sections or whether it should decide the Union’s Constitution first.’¹²⁴¹ Gandhi’s support for the Cabinet Mission plan, therefore, depended on the power of Congress in the Constituent Assembly to destroy it. The Viceroy was wise to this, telling London that there was ‘convincing evidence that Congress always meant to use their position in the interim government to break up the Muslim League and in the Constituent Assembly to destroy the Grouping scheme which was the one effective safeguard for the Muslims.’¹²⁴² At the end of August, the Muslim League passed a resolution drawing attention to the ‘lack of provision or power that could prevent any decision being taken by the Congress with its overwhelming majority.’ Congress would be in a position to ‘use the Assembly in the manner in which they have already declared ie that they will wreck the basic grouping of the provinces and extend the scope, powers and subjects of the Union Centre.’¹²⁴³ Jinnah felt that ‘there was no chance of agreement between the two parties’ because ‘whatever happened, Congress in the Constituent Assembly would succeed in whittling down the Cabinet scheme, that H.M.G would eventually be faced with a *faith accompli*, and would not have the courage to act against it.’¹²⁴⁴ The Viceroy had the identical fear: ‘I have been slow to realise: (a) that the real crux lies in the Grouping in the

¹²⁴⁰ Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom: The Complete Version* (New Delhi; Orient Longman, 1988) 164-165.

¹²⁴¹ Record of meeting, 18.5.1946, TP 7, 616.

¹²⁴² Wavell to Pethick Lawrence, 28.8.1946, TP 8, 323.

¹²⁴³ All-India Muslim League, Resolution, 29.7.1946, FP 2, 557.

¹²⁴⁴ Wavell, diary entry, 5.12.1946, *Wavell Journal*, 391.

Constituent Assembly (b) that Congress have never really meant to play over this; (c) that Cripps and Co. had no intention on insisting on their (the Mission's) plan being carried out.'¹²⁴⁵ Neither Wavell nor Jinnah fully trusted the Labour government to uphold Cabinet Mission Plan as a tribunician protection for Muslim India because they both feared that Labour was favouring Congress.¹²⁴⁶ As Penderel Moon understood it, the problem was that 'all along Cripps was in contact with Nehru either directly or indirectly through Congress agents and propagandists in the U.K., notably Krishna Menon' who kept them straight and true on the Constituent Assembly. Menon's own influence was considered so strong it was hampering the government's freedom of movement, and Pethick-Lawrence took steps to reduce his sway over the party's MPs.¹²⁴⁷ Labour therefore 'overlooked the fact that it would be totally unacceptable to the Muslim League.'¹²⁴⁸ The Muslim League promptly abandoned the Cabinet Mission Plan for Direct Action Day and it was the Muslim League's refusal to join a Constituent Assembly for India that prompted Attlee to set a firm date on Indian independence in the vain hope that it would teach India's communities to cooperate, but which certainly made the situation worse.¹²⁴⁹

Once, again the Muslim League was not alone: In a speech to the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation, Ambedkar noted that a 'Constituent Assembly is on the lips of everybody.' The figure often celebrated for authoring India's constitution remained a fierce critic of the Constituent Assembly. He believed that India could simply work from the 1935 Government of India act, global constitutional precedents and a general sense of India needing to be federal. Therefore 'the only function which could be left to a Constituent Assembly is to find a solution of the Communal Problem' which begged the question 'Can a minority accept this

¹²⁴⁵ Wavell, diary entry, 31.8.1946, *Wavell Journal* 343-344.

¹²⁴⁶ Wavell to Attlee, 28.8.1946 TP 8, 328.

¹²⁴⁷ Mr. Turnbull to Pethick-Lawrence, 28.10.1945, TP 6, 300 and Pethick-Lawrence to Wavell, 26.10.1945, TP 11, 411.

¹²⁴⁸ Penderel Moon, 'Epilogue', *Wavell Journal*, 454-455.

¹²⁴⁹ Kenneth Harris, *Attlee*, 375.

Constituent Assembly as a safe body, in the impartiality of which it can place implicit confidence?’¹²⁵⁰ This question was acute, as the treaty component of the Goodfellows formula, as outlined by Cripps, was now timetabled to *follow* the Constituent Assembly debates, making it an ineffective tribunician protection. The Working Committee of Scheduled Castes Federation rejected the ‘Constituent Assembly project’ because it feared ‘no minority will be prepared to accept the decisions of a majority’ and because ‘in the Constituent Assembly the Scheduled Castes would be completely outnumbered.’¹²⁵¹ Ambedkar was so exercised by this prospect that he contacted Churchill, describing the Labour’s proposals for a Constituent Assembly as ‘a shameful betrayal of the cause of 60 millions of Untouchables’ because they had ‘no representation in the Constituent Assembly’ and ‘no protection by Treaty.’ To Ambedkar, Labour’s policy was ‘handing over Untouchables bound head and foot.’¹²⁵² Ambedkar gave Churchill permission to relay his objections to the British press, while Churchill pledged the Conservative Party to India’s ‘sixty million untouchables.’¹²⁵³

In addition to the well-known causes of Partition arising from the subcontinent, we must add the decisions made by British political parties and their differing conceptions of British strategic interest: Labour supporting a united India through a Constituent Assembly and the Conservatives preferring balkanisation in order to keep as much of India out of the hands of Congress. This supports the underlying argument of this chapter, that the India League played a role in Indian independence, because that depends on establishing that Labour, as a party, pursued a policy that the Conservatives would not have. More broadly, it supports the view that the nature of Indian independence was not inevitable, but contingent and contested.

¹²⁵⁰ Bhim Rao Ambedkar, address delivered at the Session of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation held in Bombay on May 6, 1945, reprinted as B.R. Ambedkar, *Communal Deadlock and a Way to Solve It* (Jullundur: Bheem Patrika Publications, 1945).

¹²⁵¹ Memorandum Submitted by B.R. Ambedkar on behalf of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation to the Cabinet Mission, 5. 4.1946. Can be found in CAC/WCP/CHUR/2/42A-B.

¹²⁵² Ambedkar to Churchill, 17.5.1946, CAC/WCP/CHUR 2/42A.

¹²⁵³ Press Notice, n.d., CAC/WCP/CHUR2/42/A.

Contemporary observers certainly believed this to be true: George Orwell marvelled that ‘the British did get out of India without fighting, an event which very few observers indeed would have predicted until about a year before it happened. On the other hand, this was done by a Labour government, and it is certain that a Conservative government headed by Churchill, would have acted differently.’¹²⁵⁴ Orwell was right: the Conservatives did act differently, even when out of power, trying everything to keep a bit of India. As the wartime coalition had begun to break up Amery was hoping to bind Attlee and Cripps to a joint statement by the India Committee, to prevent them from making political ‘capital against us over India.’ The urgency was compounded by ‘Professor Laski [who] has already been making all the mischief he can at Blackpool, where the India League has been holding its session alongside the Labour Party Conference.’¹²⁵⁵ Churchill was so worried about India becoming a party issue that he even allowed Wavell to summon the Simla Conference. He only did this, however, because he thought it was bound to fail, which it did.¹²⁵⁶ Given the postwar timing of Simla, the sudden change in British policy towards India cannot be explained by postwar incapacity but by party difference: the replacement of Churchill’s classically imperial conference with Labour’s innovatively decolonising Constituent Assembly.

Sorensen would accuse Churchill of utilising ‘disunity in India’ to ‘justify delay in the implementing of Indian self-government’ and of ‘exploiting this disunity almost until the end.’¹²⁵⁷ He was right: Churchill wrote to Attlee declaring that in absence of agreement between ‘the great forces comprising Indian life’ he would resume his ‘full freedom to point the dangers and evils of the abandonment by Great Britain of her mission in India.’¹²⁵⁸

Churchill’s behaviour makes John Darwin’s assertion that a ‘curious consensus that regarded

¹²⁵⁴ George Orwell, ‘Reflections on Gandhi’ *Partisan Review*, 1.1.1949.

¹²⁵⁵ Amery to Churchill 13.5.1945, TP 4, 1057.

¹²⁵⁶ See Wavell, diary entry, 31.8.1945, *Wavell Journal*, 168.

¹²⁵⁷ Reginald Sorensen ‘The End of Conquest’, *The International News*, 1.9.1947 in PA/SP/Sor 198.

¹²⁵⁸ Martin Gilbert, *Road to Victory: Winston S Churchill 1941-45* (London: Heinemann/Minerva, 1989), 230-231.

giving up colonial rule as unavoidable' and the 'coolness' with which decolonisation was 'viewed by British politicians of all parties'¹²⁵⁹ difficult to sustain. Churchillian diehardism, and that of the wider Conservatives, was not geostrategic, nor particularly lucid, but highly emotional. Neither was it entirely sober: Neville Chamberlain attributed Churchill's intemperate attack on the government's India policy in Parliament in 1931 to 'the three whisky-and-sodas he had seen Churchill drink before the speech.'¹²⁶⁰ During the war, Churchill's tirades on India became so common they were known as 'Winstonian Volcanoes'¹²⁶¹ which were 'frantic passions' on 'the whole subject of being kicked out of India.'¹²⁶² One came in 1944, when Churchill, 'drinking heavily' turned on Attlee at 2am, 'engaging in a shouting match with him over the future of India'¹²⁶³ which Attlee took on the chin, providing cover for some terrified generals to exit the room. Amery told Churchill candidly, that with regard to India, he didn't 'see much difference between his outlook and Hitler's.'¹²⁶⁴ Amery clearly believed Churchill was a racist as 'India, or any form of self-government for coloured peoples, raises in him a wholly uncontrollable complex.'¹²⁶⁵ Churchill feared that non-white immigration to Britain would turn it into a 'maggie society' and believed that the electioneering slogan of "Keep Britain White" was legitimate and effective, lamenting his lack of support in Cabinet.¹²⁶⁶ Questions of Britain's postwar capacity had no purchase on Churchill's mind: Amery sketched some of his hopes for British rule in India, based on 'its historic right to govern India in accordance with our ideas and interests' through the 'complete control very aspect of Indian life' by means of '160,000 English and 600,000 Indian police' as well as '100,000 British troops, 500,000 Indian troops of the right kind and 100 squadrons' which would result in 'the resumption of complete control over

¹²⁵⁹ John Darwin, *End of Empire: The Debate*, 2.

¹²⁶⁰ Carl Bridge, *Holding India*, 96.

¹²⁶¹ Wm. Roger Louis, *For God's Sake Go!*, 166.

¹²⁶² *Ibid*, 165.

¹²⁶³ John Bew, *Citizen Clem*, 316.

¹²⁶⁴ Amery Diary Entry, 4.8.1944, *Amery Diaries*, 993.

¹²⁶⁵ Cited in Wm. Roger Louis, *For God's Sake Go!*, 174.

¹²⁶⁶ Leo McKinsty, *Churchill and Attlee*, 607-608.

every aspect of Indian life.’ Parliamentary oversight would be neutralised by ‘a Standing Order to the effect that...Indian affairs should not be open to discussion or be the subject of questions’¹²⁶⁷ in parliament. Amery’s conclusion was that ‘I am by no means sure whether on the subject of India he is really quite sane.’¹²⁶⁸

After the war, Churchill was busily corresponding about how to repudiate Britain’s debt to India by claiming for the cost of financing India’s wartime defence¹²⁶⁹ and, as late as 1947, was still consulting with Lord Simon on how best to upset the Indian Constituent Assembly.¹²⁷⁰ He even repudiated the Cripps Mission in the Commons, stating that because it had been rejected by Congress, its promises were void. This was in line with his view expressed in Cabinet, that after Britain had won the war ‘there was no obligation to honour promises...not taken up by the Indians.’¹²⁷¹ As late as 1947 Churchill was arguing that ‘it was a cardinal mistake to entrust the government of India to the caste Hindu, Mr. Nehru’ not least because was ‘an enemy of this country.’ As for Congress, ‘The Indian political parties and political classes do not represent the Indian people...as the movements in Britain represent the surges and impulses of the British nation.’¹²⁷²

Churchill was not alone. As late as 1944 Amery was conspiring with Linlithgow over a ‘federal enclave’¹²⁷³ within India and other ‘British Conservatives were active in exploring ways by which Britain might retain a dominating strategic position in India in the post-war period.’¹²⁷⁴ After the war, the Conservative Members Committee was exploring ways to ‘save

¹²⁶⁷ *The Regeneration of India. Memorandum by the Prime Minister* (n.d., likely August 1944) CAC/Leopold Amery Papers/AMEL 1/6/43.

¹²⁶⁸ Amery, diary entry, 4.8.1944, *Amery Diaries*, 993.

¹²⁶⁹ Churchill to T. Leslie Rowan, 23.2.1947, CAC/WCP/CHUR 2/43/A.

¹²⁷⁰ John Simon to Winston Churchill, 7.2.1947 CAC/WCP/CHUR 2/43/A.

¹²⁷¹ Amery, diary entry, 4.8.1944, *Amery Diaries*, 993.

¹²⁷² HC Deb, 6.3.1947, vol 434 col 665-667.

¹²⁷³ R.J. Moore, *Escape from Empire*, 44.

¹²⁷⁴ DA Low ‘Introduction’, *Congress and the Raj*, 33.

the subcontinent'¹²⁷⁵ through a British Monroe Doctrine, enforced by troops, and constructed by a unilateral declaration that bound India to an imperial crown. A study, commended to Churchill by Rab Butler,¹²⁷⁶ (then leading the Conservative Research Department) explored the options for when there was a 'a general collapse of law and order in India' and that 'Britain had interposed to restore the situation by force of arms.' It viewed all forms of Indian politics as illegitimate, divorced from 'real objects, real factors and real methods' and instead offered an extraordinary and totalising vision of Indian economic planning – a 'great scheme of development' though naturally 'not towards self-sufficiency as an end in itself' but as a 'unit within the larger whole of the British Empire.' This was to take place over decades and involve a 'revivified British element' as 'self-government is impractical in India' and so returned to Curzon's old vision of erecting a quasi-totalitarian state in India through the complete destruction of 'political representation.'¹²⁷⁷ Nicholas Owens has himself convincingly shown how the wider Conservative Party remained opposed to Indian independence and only failed to rise in the Commons because of a strong sense of parliamentary weakness.¹²⁷⁸

It took a lot to overcome Churchillian extremism: Indian acceptance of dominion status and efforts by Attlee, Mountbatten and even Anthony Eden, whose 'job was to keep Churchill away from the House while the [India Independence] Bill went through because if he came into the Chamber he might be unable to stop himself speaking.'¹²⁷⁹ Two of Churchill's diehard allies, Lord Simon and Hoare, now Viscount Templewood, led a revolt in the Lords – practically a motion of censure – against Attlee's Independence of India bill.¹²⁸⁰ Later, as the crisis between independent India and the princely state of Hyderabad flared up, Churchill

¹²⁷⁵ 'Patrick' to Churchill, 15.4.1946, CCA/WCP/CHUR/2/42/B.

¹²⁷⁶ Butler to Churchill, 18.12.1946, CCA/WCP/CHUR/2/42/B.

¹²⁷⁷ The memorandum is included in CCA/WCP/CHUR/2/42/B.

¹²⁷⁸ Nicholas Owen, 'The Conservative Party and Indian Independence 1945-1947' *The Historical Journal*, 46.2 (2003), 403-436.

¹²⁷⁹ Peter Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain 1945-51* (London; Penguin, 2006), 235.

¹²⁸⁰ HL Deb, 25.2.1947 col. 935.

presented himself as a crusader for the Nizam's independence. 'Attlee was genuinely outraged as what he saw as Churchill's efforts to act as a spoiler, now that Indian independence has passed.'¹²⁸¹ The *Manchester Guardian* described Attlee's 'cold fury' as he shouted, 'You don't like it, do you?' at Churchill across the House of Commons. Six years after independence Churchill would tell Eisenhower that Britain's exit was 'the most serious political blunder of the last decade.'¹²⁸² Again he was not alone: Enoch Powell would respond to the ending of the British Empire in India by walking 'the streets all night. The world as I had known it was coming apart. Occasionally...I sat down in the doorway, my head in my hands.'¹²⁸³ Carl Bridge writes of how at Conservative 'Party conferences in the 1950s it was customary for the faithful to mourn the passing of the *Raj*, echoes of rhetoric and sentiment lasting after the realities had gone.'¹²⁸⁴ For all the cool calculations of official minutes, it is the out of the clash of such high emotions that the ends of empires are made.

Conservative diehardism is important for two reasons: firstly, it demonstrated the contingent nature of Indian independence that Labour sought, under the influence of the India League. Secondly, it shows Partition to be partly produced by a pincer movement from within British politics: Labour's insistence on a Constituent Assembly that the Muslim League feared and loathed, and a Churchill-led conspiracy to divide India. This was conducted to keep a Muslim Dominion out of the hands of a Congress Party seemingly determined (at that time) to exit the Commonwealth. The initiative came from Jinnah, who 'sought out assurances that other Conservatives would support Pakistan's dominionhood. His inquiries converged with intrigues for separate princely dominions'¹²⁸⁵ conducted by Conservatives and officials. The reason for the Conservative conspiracy stands revealed in a letter by Walter Monckton to

¹²⁸¹ John Bew, *Citizen Clem*, 441.

¹²⁸² Cited in Leo McKinstry, *Churchill and Attlee*, 474.

¹²⁸³ Cited in Peter Hennessy, *Never Again*, 235.

¹²⁸⁴ Carl Bridge, *Holding India*, 163.

¹²⁸⁵ Robin Moore, 'Jinnah and the Pakistan Demand', 557.

Churchill which noted that ‘it is a sickening thing that we have to go.’¹²⁸⁶ Monckton recognised the ‘difficulty of our position with a huge Labour majority in the House’ but still felt that ‘we should do all we can to persuade and encourage the principal elements in India to remain attached to the British Empire.’¹²⁸⁷ Congress, it was assumed, would not play ball and so Monckton focused on the Princes and the Muslim League. The purpose behind this project is given greater clarity in a later letter from India, written by a touring Harold Macmillan, which also lamented the inability of the Tories to do anything while out of power, and that ‘Hindustan would probably...behave like Eire,’¹²⁸⁸ Macmillan held out hope, however, that the Muslim-controlled provinces and states would remain in the Commonwealth.

Wavell remembered Churchill urging him to ‘keep a bit of India.’¹²⁸⁹ and that he preferred ‘partition into Pakistan Hindustan, Princestan etc.’¹²⁹⁰ Churchill privately assured Jinnah that he was ‘very much opposed to the handing over of India to Hindu caste rule’ and that he felt acutely that ‘British arms should not be used to dominate the Moslems even though caste Hindus might claim a numerical majority in the constituent assembly.’¹²⁹¹ Pakistan got its Goodfellows moment at Churchill’s stately home, Chartwell, where, on the 7th of December 1946 Churchill and Jinnah had their own secret meeting,¹²⁹² following an earlier meeting between Churchill and Ambedkar.¹²⁹³ Although the archives are seemingly silent on the meeting itself, it is impossible that Churchill met Jinnah to dissuade the Quaid from his demand for Pakistan. This is underscored by the conspiratorial nature of the interaction:

Churchill’s refused be seen with Jinnah after the meeting as ‘it would be perhaps wiser for us

¹²⁸⁶ Walter Monckton to Churchill (specific date unclear) 5.1946 CAC/WCP/CHUR/2/42/A.

¹²⁸⁷ Walter Monckton to Churchill, 18.5.1946, CAC/WCP/CHUR/2/42A.

¹²⁸⁸ Note by Macmillan, 27.4.1947, CAC/WCP/CHUR/2/43B.

¹²⁸⁹ Wavell, diary entry, 31.8.1945, *Wavell Journal*, 166.

¹²⁹⁰ Wavell, diary entry, 29.3.1945, *Wavell Journal*, 120.

¹²⁹¹ Churchill to Jinnah (specific date unclear, likely first fortnight of July 1946), CAC/WCP/CHUR/2/42B.

¹²⁹² Private Secretary (Churchill) to Private Secretary (Jinnah), 5.12.1946, CAC/WCP/CHUR/2/42/B.

¹²⁹³ Private Secretary (Churchill) to Miss Ginton, 5.11.1946, CAC/WCP/CHUR/2/42/B.

not to be associated publicly at this juncture'¹²⁹⁴ as well as the use of secret postal addresses.¹²⁹⁵ The plot was wider than just Churchill, including at least Simon, Eden, Butler¹²⁹⁶ and, possibly, John Anderson and Hoare.

We can also guess at what Jinnah offered at that meeting: to keep Pakistan as a Dominion within the Commonwealth. A few days later Churchill stood in parliament and called for the Partition of India.¹²⁹⁷ He had declared that Labour policy was not 'a policy of Britain as whole' but only a 'party policy of the forces' which Labour represented and his speech stated, without ambiguity, that in the absence of communal agreement, Britain should not withdraw from their task 'to bind them and to weld them by the influence of our knowledge, our law and our higher civilisation' that would 'offer to all the nations of the West the advantages of tranquillity and peace in the East.' He asserted that 'the technical and procedural points now in dispute in Delhi are not the issue at stake...they are only the symbols and passions and hatreds deep in the soil of India and measured by the standard of a thousand years. The unity of India is of superficial appearance, imposed, by many generations of British Rule.' For Churchill, Congress inheriting the *Raj* was unacceptable, as it would require 'British troops or British officers in the Indian Army to become the agencies and instruments of enforcing caste Hindu domination upon the 90 million Muslims and 60 million Untouchables.' Churchill therefore offered the imperial parliament three options: the first was to scuttle; the second, to set up 'an impartial administration, responsible to Parliament' which would secure the 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' of Indians 'who now stand in jeopardy, bewilderment and fear' or 'the partition of Indian between two different races and religions' so that they could find 'a means of association with our great free Commonwealth.'¹²⁹⁸ In the

¹²⁹⁴ Churchill to Jinnah, 11.12.1946, CAC/WCP/CHUR/2/42/B.

¹²⁹⁵ R.J. Moore, 'Jinnah and the Pakistan Demand,' 557.

¹²⁹⁶ 'E.G.' to Churchill, 8.7.1946, CAC/WCP/CHUR/2/42/A.

¹²⁹⁷ HC Deb, 12.12.1946 vol. 431 col. 1346-1370.

¹²⁹⁸ HC Deb, 12.12.1946, vol. 431, col. 1346-1370.

words of Jinnah's biographer 'these remarks of Churchill made Jinnah take an even tougher line...this final London visit helped reassure him of the strength of Conservative Party support he still enjoyed, and it confirmed his resolve to let Nehru and Congress race round and round the constituent assembly track alone.'¹²⁹⁹ As R.J. Moore has noted, while Jinnah had been previously willing to contemplate some connections to India, after December 1946 he began insisting on a Pakistani Dominion within the Commonwealth: a new formula and exactly what Churchill was hoping for.¹³⁰⁰ Churchill was now free to attack the Constituent Assembly because the mere 'meeting in Delhi'¹³⁰¹ because this 'so-called Constituent Assembly' which, in the absence of Hindu-Muslim unity 'had absolutely no claim or right to decide the fate of India.'¹³⁰² The Conservative making of political space for Pakistan, as a function of the minority veto, had finally reached its conclusion. When Mountbatten warned Jinnah that Pakistan might not have an automatic right to join the Commonwealth, Jinnah corrected the Viceroy, revealing that Churchill had told him 'You have only to stand firm and demand your rights not to be expelled from the British Commonwealth, and you are bound to be accepted. The country would never stand for the expulsion of loyal members of the Empire.'¹³⁰³ Churchill only consented to offer Conservative support to the Indian Independence Bill (required to get it through a tight parliamentary timetable) on the condition of 'an effective acceptance of Dominion status for the several parts of a divided India'¹³⁰⁴ and erupted when Attlee termed it the 'Indian Independence Bill.'¹³⁰⁵

It was out of two transnational formations that Partition was made: Congress and Labour moving in lockstep over a Constituent Assembly, mediated by the India League, and the final,

¹²⁹⁹ Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan*, 304.

¹³⁰⁰ R.J. Moore, *Escape from Empire*, 178.

¹³⁰¹ HC Deb, 12.12.1946, vol. 431, col. 1361-1365.

¹³⁰² HC Deb, 6.4.1947, vol. 343, col. 669.

¹³⁰³ Record of interview between Mountbatten and Jinnah, 26.4.1947, TP 10, 451.

¹³⁰⁴ Churchill to Attlee, 21.5.1947, CAC/WCP/CHUR/2/43B.

¹³⁰⁵ Churchill to Attlee, 1.7.1947, CAC/WCP/CHUR/2/43B.

fatal elision between the Muslim League's doomed quest for a tribunician veto *within*, and the last gasp of the Conservative minority veto *of*, the Indian nation emerging through that Assembly. Partition therefore happened because two political movements were sceptical, for very different reasons, about the possibility of India: the Muslim League and the Conservative Party. As Amery himself put it, 'the immediate wrecker was Jinnah...but the real wrecker [was] Winston.'¹³⁰⁶

Nothing about Indian independence was inevitable: postwar Britain was scrambling to reassert its empire in East Asia and, later, Kenya and Malaya. It even assisted in the reestablishment of the Dutch and French empires in Indochina. Britain retained a defence budget that consumed one fifth of gross national product,¹³⁰⁷ fought in Korea and set off on its Suez adventure despite its 'postwar incapacity.' Equally, for the geostrategic argument to work, it requires a government sane enough to recognise British weakness. Churchill was spectacularly ill-equipped to provide this. Facing communal unrest, Wavell suggested phased withdrawal to Muslim areas (and then to keep them?) or the military reinforcement of the *Raj* for 'fifteen years.'¹³⁰⁸ Churchill would have undoubtedly chosen the latter option. Much is owed – more than is currently realised – to contingency and to Labour's coming to power in 1945 with a principled commitment to Indian independence. In most places where we can *measure* that commitment, be it the parliamentary party, party conferences, Trades Union resolutions or the preferred policy set of its leadership, we find the India League.

Krishna Menon, Mountbatten and the Partition of India

¹³⁰⁶ Wm Roger Louis, *In God's Name Go!*, 178.

¹³⁰⁷ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour in Power, 1945-1951* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 279.

¹³⁰⁸ *Listowel Memoirs*, 122.

The India League's involvement in partition was not limited to the orchestration of a Constituent Assembly. In dissolving the *Raj*, Labour created a parallel, informal, state which built on the precedents of Cripps's formal and informal visits. The India Office and the Government were entirely marginalised by these connections. In addition to Sudhir Ghosh, this gave an interlocutory role to many figures associated with the India League, including Carl Heath, Agatha Harrison, Shiva Rao and Menon. This enabled Menon to play a key role in decolonial decision making, having arrived at that position via a strange route: the last Viceroy of India. Menon had known the Mountbattens for some time,¹³⁰⁹ probably through the Earl of Huntingdon, and the last Viceroy had come to know Nehru during a visit to Singapore. It has been suggested, controversially, that it was Menon's idea to choose Mountbatten¹³¹⁰ but it is certainly true that Menon championed him to Congress and informed Cripps that 'his selection would be most acceptable to Congress leadership.'¹³¹¹ It was Cripps who suggested Mountbatten as Viceroy in Cabinet and led the way, against the reservations of Attlee, in paying the price of granting the Viceroy plenipotentiary powers.¹³¹² As for Mountbatten, he saw Menon as an 'Indian close to the Congress leadership' and therefore someone to build a relationship with.¹³¹³ Mountbatten believed that Menon was 'very much an outcast because of his left-wing views' but 'found him a valuable contact with Nehru (whose complete confidence he has)' and found him useful in keeping him 'well informed about the trend of Congress thought and opinion.'¹³¹⁴ Menon soon became 'crucial to Mountbatten's diplomacy.'¹³¹⁵ It appears that Menon was playing a role in keeping Nehru at the forefront of constitutional discussion, arguing for example that Gandhi's suggestion of 'turning over the Central Government to Mr. Jinnah' would not work because 'not even

¹³⁰⁹ Mountbatten to Listowel, 25.7.1947, TP 12, 331.

¹³¹⁰ Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, *Freedom At Midnight* (London: Collins, 1997), 8.

¹³¹¹ Phillip Ziegler, *Mountbatten: The Official Biography* (London: Phoenix, 2001), 354.

¹³¹² *Listowel Memoirs*, 125.

¹³¹³ Phillip Ziegler, *Mountbatten*, 237.

¹³¹⁴ Mountbatten to Listowel 26.7.42, *Listowel Memoirs*, 291.

¹³¹⁵ Moore, *Escape from Empire*, 218.

Gandhi could put this particular scheme through.’¹³¹⁶ Menon later accompanied Mountbatten to Delhi where his task, according to the Viceroy, was ‘to help to give me the background of what was going on in Congress circles, and to help me to put over any points that I found too delicate to handle directly myself.’¹³¹⁷ Menon was conveying important information that Congress might regret but not resist the concession of a ‘truncated’ Pakistan, and offering in turn to ‘put this idea over to Nehru if required.’ Moreover, Menon suggested to Mountbatten that an early declaration of Dominion status be made, including possibly ‘equal dominion status to Hindustan and Pakistan’ with the option for the states to join either of those ‘two confederations.’¹³¹⁸ In May 1947 Menon joined the Viceroy and Nehru in Simla where he stayed ‘up with 4AM’ with the latter mulling over partition proposals.’¹³¹⁹ It was Menon who suggested to Mountbatten that ‘If India and Pakistan were both to accept Commonwealth membership, the unity of the subcontinent would to some degree be preserved, independence could therefore be granted more rapidly, and the right of Bengal, the North-West Frontier or other states to opt for independence would be at worst left implicit, and with luck excluded altogether.’ Nehru ‘grasped eagerly at this lifeline, as did Mountbatten’¹³²⁰ and it was the ‘unexpected possibility of India’s accession to the Commonwealth that’ that ‘temporarily reconciled’ Churchill to Indian independence. Menon wrote to Mountbatten arguing that any transfer of power under Dominion status required the complete exclusion of Muslim League involvement, or anything that might prevent the Centre functioning. As Menon put it ‘If Mr. Jinnah wants total separation, and that straight away, and if we agree to it for the sake of peace and dismember our country, we want to be rid of him.’¹³²¹ The prospect of Pakistan was, as ever, played to British interests. Mountbatten spooked Menon with a Pakistani army which, because of its Commonwealth status, would ‘have a complete call on British officers,

¹³¹⁶ Record of interview between Mountbatten and Menon, 5.4.1947, TP 10, 133.

¹³¹⁷ Cited in Jairam Ramesh, *A Chequered Brilliance*, 355.

¹³¹⁸ Record of interview between Mountbatten and Menon, 22.4.1947, TP, 10, 133.

¹³¹⁹ Phillip Ziegler, *Mountbatten*, 378.

¹³²⁰ Minutes of Viceroy’s thirtieth staff meeting, 10.5.1947, TP 10, 729 and Phillip Ziegler, *Mountbatten*, 382.

¹³²¹ Menon to Mountbatten, 21.5.1947, TP 10, 939.

and all the Services, who wished to remain in India, since they could so remain whilst retaining the King's Commission.' Mountbatten constructed elaborate and fearful scenarios of a Pakistan armed to the teeth by the Americans and the British through an enhanced Commonwealth connection, with their officers at military schools using secret equipment, 'experimental establishments' and with Karachi as some sort of South Asian Suez, replete with 'naval and air bases within the British commonwealth.' The aim was to pressure India to stay in the Commonwealth. Menon noted that 'this would be extremely difficult for him to get over, even with Nehru...and even more difficult with Patel's and almost impossible with Congress. 'He said that the furthest he thought it would be possible to go would be to call themselves an independent nation in relation with the British Commonwealth.'¹³²² Menon had long discussions with Mountbatten over key constitutional questions, including how to square a Commonwealth connection with his resolution in the Constituent Assembly establishing an independent sovereign republic, with the conclusion being that this might be 'treated as an expression of ultimate aspiration.' Menon proposed a notion of 'a common citizenship' so as to provide a degree of allegiance between India and the British crown that would enable the army to function after independence.'¹³²³ It was Menon who suggested that 'India need not undertake any overt act of recognising the King, but he could continue to be president, as it were, of the club in which India was remaining as a member.'¹³²⁴ This was an idea that Nehru drove hard, overcoming Churchill, who harboured ambitions for the King to be President of India and even Attlee, who wanted Nehru to find a title for the King from 'India's heroic age.'¹³²⁵ This changed the British Commonwealth profoundly. Menon now feared himself being outflanked from the 'left' as he moved towards dominion status. He noted how, if the 'Left Wing' of the Congress 'accused the present leaders of having sold

¹³²² Record of interview between Mountbatten and Menon, 22.4.1947, TP 10, 371.

¹³²³ Menon to Mountbatten, 21.5.1947, TP 10, 939.

¹³²⁴ Menon to Nehru, 28.11.1948, cited in Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, 2, 50.

¹³²⁵ Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, 2, 51.

themselves to Great Britain, those leaders would be finished.’¹³²⁶ A delicate irony emerges that having campaigned for decades to terminate British imperialism in India, Menon, having reached a new height of influence, was instrumental in finding a formula that preserved the Commonwealth connection, tempered by the fact that that formula finally allowed the substance of British power to be removed from the subcontinent.

Against a historiography that privileges a geostrategic interest, postwar incapacity, official decision-making and negotiations between nations, the India League reveals a history of Indian independence made of anticolonial principle, solidarity and the politics of friendship. Key decolonial policies originated in non-official political space, which was transnational, anticolonial and prewar. This produced an Indian independence that was contingent and contested: viewed with suspicion by officials and the Viceroy, and hostility by the Conservatives, Ambedkar and Jinnah. The eventual formation of a separate Assembly for Pakistan, the disappearance of the treaty, along with continuing negotiations with community-representing leaders under Mountbatten meant that while the India League’s campaign for Indian independence through a Constituent Assembly was substantially successful, its accompanying intent of minoritizing the Muslim League within that Assembly had backfired spectacularly with enormous and, for many, extraordinarily tragic consequences. Given this history of the India League, Labour, Congress, the Muslim League and the Constituent Assembly, however, Jinnah’s refusal to enter the Assembly appears to be less a war of manoeuvre and more of position: a refusal to let his movement be reduced from parity with Congress implied by the ‘minority veto’ conferred by empire to a powerless minority within a decolonising institution designed *with that very end in mind*. It must also be remembered that the Constituent Assembly, while unquestionably intended to disempower the Muslim League, did so to solve the ‘communal problem.’ The communal

¹³²⁶ Minutes of Viceroy’s thirtieth staff meeting, 10.5.1947, TP 10, 729.

problematization of India's constitutional progress was made, however, by officials, Conservatives and especially Churchill. Thus, both independence and partition was produced by the specific arrangement of the transnational politics that the India League participated in and helped to shape: Conservative insistence on the minority veto, the India League's dissolution of that veto through Labour, Congress's insistence that only it represented all of India as a *necessarily* anticolonial claim, and the Muslim League's clear choice of Pakistan over minoritization within India's Constituent Assembly. If we are to address the vexed question of blame, then Labour deserves opprobrium for attempting to railroad India into a Constituent Assembly, but they were doubly blinded: by Congress and the India League insisting on the Assembly and Conservative reduction of Jinnah's organisation to the minority veto that Labour rightly identified as a cynical ploy. Equally, it cannot be denied that imperial officials and Conservatives had much to gain by the amplification of the demand for Pakistan (be it Craddock in the 1930s, Amery and Linlithgow during the war or Churchill afterwards) as a means to delay, ward off or attenuate Indian independence, thereby making a united India harder to realise. Thus, historical attentiveness to a small organisation of transnational anticolonialism, the India League, reveals that neither Indian nationalist histories, nor the British historiography of consolatory incapacity, inevitability and apolitical consensus can explain the ends of empire in the Indian subcontinent, one of the most significant decolonisation in history. This is because these were produced transnationally, *actively* and by the interaction of political imperialism and anticolonialism. Thus, the very institution, brought by Labour and the India League, that made Indian independence possible by dissolving the imperial and Conservative minority veto also helped drive the Muslim League out of India.

Conclusion and Afterlives

On the 6th of August 1947, 'The Executive Committee of the India League' placed on record 'its deep gratification at the termination of imperial rule in India and, while regretting that

independence has been won only at the price of the sacrifice of Indian unity.¹³²⁷ More dolorously, in 1949, the Annual General Meeting of the members of the India League sought to convey 'to the people of India its sympathy in the tribulations that have followed in the wake of partition and as a consequence of communal violence and disorders, and notes with relief and satisfaction that these have now come to an end.'¹³²⁸ The India League would also suffer its own partition. As its more radical left-wing figures began criticising Nehru's Government for certain repressive policies, others accused this critique of being colonial, leading to a final, fatal split.¹³²⁹ In any case, it could never have survived being a creature of the agitating Indian diaspora, the British left *and* India House, where Menon was now ensconced as High Commissioner. Thus, the broad coalition that the India League had sustained for so long finally unravelled in face of the one event it could not overcome: Indian independence.

Before it unravelled, the India League had developed from its origins among the theosophists to a major part of Britain's progressive associational life, with branches throughout the country, a secretariat and a core of dedicated members and funders. It had the ears of foreign Ambassadors, participated in the global left that confronted fascism, mobilised the diaspora in novel and radical ways, embarrassed the British Empire across America and attempted to make the Secretary of State for India accountable for famine and constitutional deadlock. It succeeded at achieving a provisional accountability for India in Parliament and (unwittingly) destroyed IPI. It saw its primary arguments around colonial violence, antifascism and economic nationalism taken up by figures as diverse as Fenner Brockway, Huntingdon and the Tobacco Workers Union. It saw its preferred policy for India, a Constituent Assembly, implemented with consequences both extraordinary and tragic. The India League's

¹³²⁷ India League, Resolution of the Executive Committee, 6.7.1947, NMML/KMP/193.

¹³²⁸ India League, Annual General Meeting of Members, 3.4.1949, NMML/KMP/193.

¹³²⁹ See NMML/KMP/193 for the twists, turns and final split.

accomplishments reveal the ideological, mobilisational and solidaristic extensiveness of Indian anticolonialism in Britain, both in terms of its fusalional, global and even universal political horizons, but also its ability to exert pressure at the highest levels of the British state, and successfully transform an anticolonial idea – a Constituent Assembly – into decolonial policy. This also reveals the degree to which British imperialism in India was contested and even repudiated among powerful sections of the British left in the years before decolonisation. It also shows that anticolonial agency, as opposed to purely official initiatives, lay behind many of the decolonial departures undertaken by the British state, including the Cripps Mission and the summoning of a Constituent Assembly for India. Equally, the resistance to its campaign reveals the ways in which normative imperialism was a source of undying affiliation and emotional commitment among the British right-wing and colonial officials. The lines of contest between imperialism and anticolonialism did not map onto colony and metropole but lay athwart national borders and the silos of empire as they were formed out of transnational affiliation and solidarity: Labour, the India League and Congress on one hand and the Conservatives and Muslim League on the other.

The India League provides a rare example of anticolonial transnationalism playing a demonstrable role in the dissolution of an empire. For all that the India League depended on Congress, made political capital out of its electoral victories and evoked an imaginary of India that was fundamentally reconfigured by Gandhi's mass mobilisations, much of its campaign took place (inconveniently for Indian nationalist historiography) in Britain and among the imperial British. This allows it to challenge British history-writing that seeks the consolations of inevitability in explaining decolonisation and which plays down contestation in favour of 'safe stories' of reform: absent-mindedness or liberal consensus. The British empire in India did not fall because of the rational realisation by officials of postwar

incapacity, but because prewar anticolonial initiatives, in which the Goodfellows agreement was a major conjuncture, had come to fruition. We know this because Labour's policy was contingent, distinctive and bold, finding no support among Conservatives and carefully bypassing the India Office and Viceroy through parallel structures: official missions and non-official contacts, many of which were mediated by the India League. Given the contingent nature of Indian independence we are forced to speculate as to what would have happened differently if MacDonald had secured central responsibility in 1930 or Cripps an Indian Cabinet in 1942, instead of their initiatives being scuppered by Hoare and Churchill evoking and strengthening the minority veto: there is clearly a reckoning to be had between the Conservative Party and Partition.

The India League might have steered Labour and kept it honest to its proclaimed principles, but it produced no general repudiation of imperialism, despite its own transnationality. As is well known, through the doctrine of colonial development, Labour was able to square its socialism with imperialism and while South Asia enjoyed independence, other colonies were forced to settle for the Fourth British Empire: groundnuts if they were lucky and emergencies if they were not. There was a universalist legacy to the India League, however: Even though Brockway and Menon had parted ways before the war, there had been a reconciliation at Birmingham and after the war Brockway presided over the Movement for Colonial Freedom. This affiliated with many of the same trades unions that had supported the India League, including the NUR, NUM, AEU, FBU and Tobacco Workers, while also drawing in India League supporters like the IWA, Peace Pledge Union, Connolly Association and others.¹³³⁰ Individual supporters included old India League hands like Barbara Castle, Sybil Thorndike, Julius Silverman, Aneurin Bevan, Michael Foot, John Hynd and Reginald Sorensen and even followed the India League's strategy of having regional branches in the old hotspots of

¹³³⁰ Daniel Gorman, *Uniting Nations: Britons and Internationalism, 1945–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 157

Birmingham and Merseyside, and producing a snowstorm of anticolonial questions in the House of Commons about British rule in Africa, including violence in Kenya, often in collaboration with anticolonial movements in Africa.¹³³¹ Thus, while the India League may have only directly contributed to the independence of India and, accidentally, Pakistan, it was outlived by its anticolonial strategy, coalition-building and the spirit of the Spanish Universality which established an accountability by proxy, even an anticolonialism, for the colonies of the British Empire far beyond India itself.

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¹³³¹ Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 239-250.

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