

**AT HOME IN THE WORLD: JAWAHARLAL NEHRU  
AND GLOBAL ANTI-IMPERIALISM**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation situates Indian nationalist politics in a broad, international context of anti-imperialist movements beginning in the late colonial and interwar period. The archival record is rich with sources on the international and transnational connections of the Indian National Congress (INC); however, scholarship on the independence movement almost exclusively concentrates on the micro-histories of ‘locality, province, and nation’ or the ‘subalterns’ of India. Instead, this project contributes a much-needed international perspective to Indian colonial history. As a case study, this dissertation traces the relationship between Jawaharlal Nehru, then a prominent leader of the Indian independence movement and later India’s first prime minister (1947-1964), and the League against Imperialism (LAI), a significant, yet little studied organization founded in Brussels in February 1927. The League offered a significant space for Nehru, and by extension the Indian National Congress, to interact and build partnerships with political leaders in other colonies, mandates and dependencies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America; as well as North American and European social reformers concerned with working class and racial equality. A history of Nehru and his League connections underscores the significance of the international terrain in which Indian nationalists contested empire. In this project I argue that the making of Indian anti-colonial nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s emerged as a complex set of interactions on the ground in India, but also beyond the colonial borders of the subcontinent.

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*For Lou*

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## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Nehru and the “New World”

Jawaharlal Nehru sailed to Europe in March 1926 for the first time since his schooldays in Britain. Nehru remarked of his trip later in his autobiography, “I was going back to Europe after more than thirteen years – years of war, revolution, and tremendous change. The old world I knew had expired in the blood and horror of the War and a new world awaited me.”<sup>1</sup> The “new” post-World War I Europe he visited in 1926 had witnessed the fall of old empires and czars; and the emergence of new great powers- the United States and Soviet Russia- flanking powers like Britain and France. Belligerent nations of the Great War utilized new technologies to wage total war, while the casualties and destruction of property reached unprecedented heights. The most obvious and immediate change after the war had been the dismantling of the once-powerful Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires. The map of Europe and Western Asia had to be redrawn in the war’s wake.

The “old world” Nehru referenced was antebellum Europe where Nehru lived in the heart of the British Empire for his education and legal training from 1905 to 1912. Before the 1920s, Nehru was a young and dutiful son with little interest in the world beyond his small circle of family and friends that shared a similar, middle class background. Born into a Brahman family in 1889, Nehru enjoyed a privileged upbringing

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<sup>1</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, rev. ed. (1936; repr., New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004), 156. Citations are to the Penguin edition.

and the lifestyle of the emergent and upwardly mobile middle class in British India.<sup>2</sup> The Nehrus were among this small, urban-based, and Western educated class taking up jobs within colonial society as professionals – lawyers, journalists, and physicians. Nehru’s father, Motilal, became a wealthy and successful lawyer in Allahabad. He planned for young Nehru to receive the best education accessible for British Indians. In the fall of 1905, he sent his sixteen-year-old son to Harrow, a premiere boarding school in Northwest London. “Joe” Nehru, as his Harrow peers called him, passed his coursework without remarkable distinction, and he began studies at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1907.<sup>3</sup> His small circle of friends comprised mostly of other Indian students and especially two of his cousins, who were also students in Britain. Nehru’s letters home reflected a disinterest in studies and especially law, but he finished his legal training and passed the bar examinations in London in 1912. The dutiful son returned to India to practice law with his father. Biographer Sarvepalli Gopal rightly characterized Nehru’s time abroad in antebellum Britain as “uninformative years;” Nehru “emerged from seven years in England, having passed through the mill of a traditional education, with no confidence in himself or interest in the world.”<sup>4</sup>

Unlike his years of formal education in antebellum Britain, Nehru’s return to the “new world” of Europe in 1926 would be significantly transformative. In the years between his intermittent trips abroad, Nehru changed significantly from a dutiful son to a

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the Indian National Congress leaders as the emergent middle class in British India, see Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru* (London: Routledge Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 10.

young nationalist politically awakened. He began to consider the problems of British colonial rule in India and became an active political organizer at the local, provincial and national levels. In the early 1920s, he took on a leadership role in the politics of his province, the United Provinces (U.P.), and served as a secretary of the Indian National Congress (INC), the preeminent institution in the anti-colonial struggle against British rule in India. While the early 1920s proved to be formative for Nehru's anti-colonial perspectives on the local, provincial, and national levels, his trip to Europe from 1926 to 1927 encouraged him to consider the problems of colonial rule in India within a broader international framework

The present work aims to tell the story of Nehru's encounter with the "new world" in the 1920s with particular attention to the most formative event of his journey – the Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism held in Brussels in February 1927. In Brussels, Nehru came to envision India's anti-colonial struggle as an integral part of an international resistance to imperialism.<sup>5</sup> Over 170 delegates attended the inaugural meeting in Brussels and represented 134 organizations from 37 countries. 70 of those delegates came from colonies, mandates, and dependencies traveling great

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<sup>5</sup> Few historical accounts of the League against Imperialism exist. The relationship between LAI delegates from Ireland and India are examined in Kate O'Malley, *Ireland, India and Empire: Indo-Irish Radical Connections, 1919-64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008). Also, more recently, one chapter is dedicated to the Brussels Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism in Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007). For the most detailed and cited account see Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville, eds., *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. VII, (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), 40-49. For very brief accounts see also Jean Jones, *The League Against Imperialism* (Lancashire: The Socialist History Society and the Lancashire Community Press, 1996), as part of the Socialist History Occasional Pamphlet Series; and Chapter 8 in S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 51-58.

distances, and often illegally, to Brussels.<sup>6</sup> Nehru met colleagues from China, the Dutch East Indies, Indo-China, Persia, South Africa, Morocco, Algeria, Tunis, Egypt, Mexico, Argentina, Palestine and the Philippines; he also encountered a cohort of influential leftists, trade unionists, socialists, communists, pacifists, parliamentary legislators, and civil liberties reformers from the USA, Soviet Russia, Britain, continental Europe, and Japan. It was the firm belief of the Brussels delegates that if imperialism depended on the global movement of capital, labor, and ideas, then empires must be contested globally. At the conclusion of the proceedings, Nehru and the other delegates unanimously resolved to create a permanent organization, the League against Imperialism, as a means to coordinate and unite an international anti-imperialist movement. The League against Imperialism provided the institutional framework for Nehru and others to collectively envision once isolated anti-colonial movements as interconnected and mutually interdependent.

How did Nehru envision the relationship between Indian anti-colonial nationalism and international anti-imperialism? How did his ideas about India and the world change overtime? These fundamental questions drive this dissertation as it traces the history of Nehru's engagement with international anti-imperialism throughout the late 1920s and 1930s. Central to answering these questions is the underlying argument that the meaning of nationalism develops not only in relation to people within national borders, but also in

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<sup>6</sup> Sources vary on the exact numbers. Approximately 170 delegates attended, representing 134 organizations from 37 countries. For the most comprehensive collection of documents issued by the League against Imperialism, including propaganda, manifestos, and resolutions, see the League against Imperialism Archive (1927-1931), International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, Netherlands. Hereafter IISH Papers.

relation to the world beyond national borders.<sup>7</sup> I argue that, at the Brussels Congress and through the League, Nehru's vision of Indian nationalism came to be refined and refashioned in relation to an international community of anti-imperial activists abroad. Consequently, Nehru's own intellectual and political horizon came to extend beyond the local and national frames of India into a broader mapping of anti-imperial resistance taking place worldwide. This international geography of anti-imperialism enveloped Nehru into a community that extended beyond the Indian subcontinent and rendered relevant in his everyday politics of resistance places as distant as Jakarta, Canton, Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels, London, New York, and Moscow.

## 1.2 Approach: Biography and History

This dissertation approaches the interplay of Indian nationalism and international anti-imperialism through a biographical lens. No other Indian leader straddled both the worlds of nationalism and internationalism as did Jawaharlal Nehru, one of India's most iconic figures. For historians of the generation of Indians who lived through the run-up to independence, Nehru emerges as the romanticized hero of the Indian nation-state and the mythologized history of the Indian National Congress struggle.<sup>8</sup> His critics, more vocal since his death in 1964, have castigated Nehru for being too complacent about minority and communal demands; too socialist with economic policy; too elitist; and too much of

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<sup>7</sup> For this argument, see for example Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*; and B.R. Nanda, *The Nehrus: Motilal and Jawaharlal* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1962).

an Englishman.<sup>9</sup> Few historians have ventured outside the national terrain to understand Nehru in the world.<sup>10</sup> This dissertation de-centers Nehru's nationalist activities as the only frame of analysis, and situates him *at home in the world of anti-imperialism*. As this dissertation demonstrates, the League against Imperialism is a particularly illustrative example of Nehru's involvement in a network of international scale.

Biographical research offers an important lens for investigating both the individual and the broader issues of history. Although it has become unfashionable to study elite individuals in history, particularly in the wake of subaltern scholarship in South Asia, individuals did matter to the outcomes of local, national, and international histories of colonial and postcolonial India.<sup>11</sup> The mass appeal of the Indian National Congress hinged upon the charismatic, personal leadership of Gandhi, and Nehru became an iconic symbol of the independent Indian nation.<sup>12</sup> While domestically Nehru's political policies were always tempered by a reliance on the Congress Party support, he acted with little constraint in his efforts to chart a foreign policy for India from the 1920s onward. Therefore, it is worthwhile to study Nehru's ideas and beliefs about India and the

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> A notable exception is Zachariah, *Nehru*.

<sup>11</sup> Even scholars seeking to liberate the subaltern from elite discourse have fallen back on the writings and discourse of colonial officials and nationalist leaders. See, for example Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> For arguments about Nehru as the embodiment or symbol of India, as well as the politics around this, see Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1998); and the preface to Zachariah, *Nehru*.



world that emerged in the late 1920s from his connections to an international community of anti-imperialists.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond Nehru's personal history, this biographical project uses his sources and perspectives as a prism for exploring larger questions about Indian history and colonial historiography in general.<sup>14</sup> One of the striking characteristics of Indian colonial history over the past several decades is its concentration on the local, provincial, and national dimensions of the sub-continent.<sup>15</sup> While studies of the fragments, the subalterns, and the communal histories have challenged scholars in profound ways, the people and ideas that defied such boundaries of the local and national, like Nehru and international anti-

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<sup>13</sup> I borrow here from Richard Immerman's work on cognitive psychology and diplomatic history. He argues: "once we form a belief, or are predisposed to believe something, we are loath to qualify let alone discard it." Despite changing historical conditions, individual leaders tend to ignore new information and make decisions "consistent with and confirming a preexisting belief or image." It is important in the study of foreign relations, therefore, to develop an understanding of an individual's core beliefs. Immerman sees a politician's "core beliefs" as products of experiences taking place very early in one's life. Instead, this dissertation sees Nehru's experience in Europe, much later in his life, as a catalyst in his formulations of core ideas about India and the world that would remain consistent in his thinking despite changing conditions and information he encountered after the 1920s. See Richard Immerman, "Intelligence and Strategy: Historicizing Psychology, Policy and Politics," *Diplomatic History* 32, 1, (January 2008), 1-23. More recently, Immerman considers U.S. history from a biographical lens in *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> In defense of biography, Judith M. Brown writes an excellent piece on the ways studies of individuals in South Asia illuminate the broader historical themes of global and local significance. See, Judith M. Brown, "'Life Histories' and the History of Modern South Asia," in the *AHR Roundtable on Historians and Biography*, *American Historical Review* 114, 3, (June 2009), 587- 595.

<sup>15</sup> The Subaltern Studies Collective and the Cambridge School, as well as Marxist historians, emphasize the fragmentation within Indian society and the elitist nature of those who claim to know and define the Indian nation. For examples of Subaltern scholarship see Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); and Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). For an introduction to the Cambridge Collective, see Howard Spodek, "Pluralist Politics in British India: The Cambridge Cluster of Historians of Modern India," *American Historical Review* 84, 3, (June 1979), 688-707. For examples of Cambridge scholarship, see C.A. Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India: Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Judith M. Brown, *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). For a subaltern and marxist interpretation of Indian anti-colonial nationalism see Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947* (Macmillan: New Delhi, 1983).

imperialism, have been neglected. More recently, colonial historians have sought to understand the multi-layered and multi-directional relationship between colony and metropole as occupying a shared and mutually interdependent space.<sup>16</sup> Yet, all of these studies assume that historical processes in the colony are taking place in a vacuum, isolated from broader world events and forces. This dissertation not only builds upon the rich contributions of colonial studies, but also grapples with the ties that linked India to a world beyond the metropole, transcending the borders of nation-states, colonial states, and empires.

In Brussels and through the League against Imperialism, Nehru became intertwined in the networks, politics, and histories not only of India and the British Empire, but also of international anti-imperialist movements in the 1920s and 1930s. This dissertation brings together the fields of international history and colonial studies, two fields typically studied separately. Practitioners of international history in the U.S. academy have been trained as diplomatic historians but have distinguished their work from more traditional approaches to foreign relations.<sup>17</sup> These “new international

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The Manly Englishman and the Effeminate Bengali in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995). The “new imperial history” also addresses the ways the empire came home to the metropole and shaped British culture and identity. For an introduction to the “new imperial history,” see Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> For the roots of the debates over the emerging field of international history and its relationship to U.S. Foreign Relations, see “Writing the History of U.S. Foreign Relations: A Symposium,” in *Diplomatic History* 14, no. 4 (October 1990), 553-606.

history” projects can be classified in three broad categories.<sup>18</sup> The first attempts to incorporate archival research from more than one country and/or integrate multiple state actors into their studies to counteract any critiques of American ethnocentrism in traditional diplomatic histories. The second brings to the forefront a host of characters one might call non-state actors that interacted with the international community and/or other states. It displaces states as the only relevant actors in diplomatic histories. The third embraces alternative, “soft” forms of power, like culture and gender analyses, to understand diplomacy and international relations. Despite these more innovative ways of conceptualizing international history, actors from the colonies rarely appear in this field, which is still dominated by narratives of the post-1945 era and leaders from the United States, Europe, the Soviet Union, and China.<sup>19</sup> International histories of the interwar period in particular tend to focus on great power politics or the rise of non-governmental organizations.<sup>20</sup> Only one notable example considers the complexities of imperialism and

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<sup>18</sup> For a statement on the distinctions between traditional diplomatic history and the “new international history” field, see Erez Manela, “Reconceiving International History,” *Reviews in American History* 37, 1, (2009), 69-77.

<sup>19</sup> There are two notable exceptions of international historians working in the post-1945 era that have integrated international and imperial history effectively. See, Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> The pioneer of studying the history of international organizations is Akira Iriye. Yet, his work frames international non-governmental and non-state organizations as neutral projects, free of power, and acting autonomously from the geopolitics of nation-states. Iriye also assumes that people from the colonies participated in the international NGOs as equal players. This was not necessarily the case in some of his examples such as the Communist International and the League of Nations. His research focuses on the international institutions themselves and not members from the colonized world. There are no sources from colonial actors or particular attention to their contributions to the formation of such interwar international institutions. For his seminal text see, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

anti-colonial nationalism in the context of international histories of the interwar years.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, few historians of colonialism have ventured beyond the frames of the metropole-colony relationship to consider the interplay of international institutions and networks of colonies or the imperial system.<sup>22</sup> This study offers a much-needed study of interwar internationalism, colonialism, and India.

I argue that to insist on framing colonial resistance as an isolated and local project is to neglect what was possible for colonial reformers and activists like Nehru and his colleagues in the League against Imperialism. Studies of empire have offered exciting and provocative scholarship on the transnational nature of imperialism, as people, goods, and ideas moved across and through metropolitan and colonial borders within and in the service of the empire.<sup>23</sup> This dissertation asks that we also consider the ways anti-colonial resisters traveled imperial circuits to challenge and subvert empire. Mohandas Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose, of course, are well-studied Indian nationalists who formulated resistance through experiences in other colonies of the British Empire.<sup>24</sup> Nehru also

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<sup>21</sup> For an international history of anti-colonial nationalism in India, China, Korea, and Egypt during the Paris Peace meetings in 1919, see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anti-Colonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). A paper presented by Carolyn Biltoft offers a promising reading of India and the League of Nations that extends beyond 1919. "Worlds Political, Worlds Divine: Religious Categories in Political Contexts" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the World History Association, Salem, MA, June 2009).

<sup>22</sup> For an excellent study of anti-colonial nationalists during the interwar period from an international and transnational perspective, see Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> For recent works on empire as a global and transnational network or system see Thomas Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India and the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire and Transnationalism, 1880-1950*, ed. by Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine and Frank Trentman, (New York: Palgrave, 2007); *De-centering Empire*, ed. by Durba Ghose and Dane Keith Kennedy (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2006); and Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*.

<sup>24</sup> Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*.

traveled and harnessed the routes created by international communism, socialism, pacifism, and anti-imperialism to create new connections for India that remained outside the framework of the British Empire.

Ultimately, this dissertation asks that we rethink Indian colonial history as a more dynamic process between local, national, international, and transnational actors. There has been much debate about the utility, as well as definitions, of concepts like transnational, international, global, and world histories.<sup>25</sup> The transnational normatively connotes ideas, networks, and institutions that transcend territorial borders, while international considers the relationship of states to each other or non-state actors.<sup>26</sup> On its most fundamental level, the League against Imperialism emerged as an attempt to construct a transnational community of anti-imperialists to contest capitalism and imperialism. The League against Imperialism also linked the struggle against capitalism-imperialism to the struggles of oppressed races, ethnicities, minorities, and women. The League argued that, if capitalist expansion and exploitation operates as a transnational system- across and through geographical borders, but also across the categorical

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History - Participants: C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed." *The American Historical Review* 111, 5 (2006), 1440-1464; and H-Diplo Discussion, "Terminology: Diplomatic History, International History and Transnationalism," H-Net.org, March 19 to April 6, 2009, <<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Diplo&month=0903&week=c&msg=RW0h0bKQ1Y16VmJx%2b0MXg&user=&pw=>> (June 21, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> As the AHR forum on transnationalism rightly points out, there are many manifestos and calls for transnational histories, yet few studies have been produced. For examples of transnational history, see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993); and Hall *Civilising Subjects*. C.A. Bayly argues that histories before the twentieth century have not been labeled transnational, but are inherently transnational because nation-states were not the primarily unit of political organization. See his *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780- 1830* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 1989). Frederick Cooper makes a similar point in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

boundaries of class, nation, race, ethnicity, and gender - then the anti-imperialist movement ought to contest oppression and its offshoots transnationally.

Nevertheless, I opt to use the less fashionable term, “international,” to characterize the League against Imperialism community that Nehru encountered at Brussels and throughout the late 1920s and 1930s. As we will see in subsequent chapters, Nehru and other members of the League spoke a language of internationalism. The League organized members as representatives from nations; while some European delegates were members of national governments and spoke for their respective nation-states. Even transnational participants used and worked within the framework and language of internationalism. The League also served as an international tool for the making of nationalism and nation-states in the colonies. Even though the League is an example of the shared spaces where transnational, international, and national affiliations and agendas intersected and overlapped, Nehru and his anti-imperial comrades aspired to attain an internationally organized world of equal and interdependent states through vehicles like the League against Imperialism. Rather than displace the nation-state, interwar organizations like the League against Imperialism reinforced the primacy of the nation-state as key geopolitical unit in the changing contours of the twentieth-century world.

### 1.3 Context: Internationalism in the 1920s

Historians have long considered Nehru an “internationalist,” but few have fleshed out the precise dimensions of his internationalism in the context of the 1920s and his

travels abroad.<sup>27</sup> To be sure, Nehru encountered multiple internationalisms during his travels across postwar Europe in 1926 and 1927. Initially, he came to Europe in March 1926 to attend to his wife, Kamala, who suffered from chronic tuberculosis. The family stayed at first in Geneva for Kamala's treatments, and later moved to the Montana, a mountain resort in Switzerland, for the remaining months until their departure in December 1927. As his wife's health improved, Nehru ventured beyond his Swiss headquarters to Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Britain. As his travels broadened, Nehru increasingly encountered "new" internationalist ideas and models. But what was "new" about the postwar decade of the 1920s? How did this postwar context give rise to projects like the Brussels Congress and League against Imperialism, as well as Nehru's involvement in them?

Nehru was not unique in characterizing the Great War as a harbinger of change ushering out the "old" world and making a "new" postwar world. In India, the Great War weakened the British Empire and changed the relationship between metropole and colony in the 1920s.<sup>28</sup> A reversal in economic relations between the Britain and its "crown jewel" made India more fiscally autonomous from the metropole, while Indian capitalists reaped the benefits of increased production and profit during the war. The British Empire depended on India for over a million soldiers and significant wartime resources, a contribution that reaffirmed India's importance to the empire. It also raised Indian expectations for greater political autonomy after the war. Indian soldiers returned home

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<sup>27</sup> See Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*; Zachariah, *Nehru*; and Judith Brown, *Nehru: A Political Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of the effects of the Great War on the British colonial rule in India, see Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*, 23-65.

from the war telling horror stories about the violence of the “civilized” powers of Europe, which shook the foundations of the “civilizing mission” espoused in the nineteenth-century. The Jallianwalla Bagh massacre in 1919, in which the British army under the direction of General Reginald Dyer opened fire on an unarmed crowd of Indian men, women, and children, further tarnished the image of benevolent colonial rule and ushered in a new era of discontent across the sub-continent. In the aftermath of war and the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre, the advent of Mohandas Gandhi’s leadership at the helm of the Indian National Congress (INC) launched an unprecedented mass protest against the British in India from 1920 to 1922. Although India anti-colonial nationalist agitation had abated by the time Nehru traveled to Europe, the ascendancy of Gandhi and the mobilization of the INC would continue to challenge the raj in the late 1920s and 1930s.

The Great War also changed the international landscape of the 1920s. As memory of the war’s carnage began to fade, the immediate postwar generation held great hopes for refashioning a “new” postwar world through international meetings and institutions. For example, both the League of Nations and the Communist International (Comintern) offered blueprints for a world of greater stability and international order, albeit by very different means. As historian Akira Iriye points out, the quantity and membership of international organizations surged to new heights in the interwar years.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, those who contributed to the wartime effort – especially workers, women, minorities, and the colonized – anticipated rewards for their sacrifices in the form of greater social and political equality in the war’s aftermath. Mobilization for national

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<sup>29</sup> Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).



sovereignty, working class rights, suffrage, civil liberties, pacifism, disarmament and anti-racism grew dramatically in the 1920s. International organizations and conferences often created new and diverse platforms for these state and non-state actors to meet and engage in dialogue across geographic and, often ideological borders, in the hopes of refashioning the postwar world.<sup>30</sup>

The Paris Peace Settlement (1919) had set the precedent for international meetings and conferences that were so central to the 1920s international sphere of debate. However, the settlement offered little for colonies seeking national sovereignty or greater self-rule within their respective empires. Characterized by Erez Manela as the “Wilsonian Moment,” the immediate postwar months have been seen as a brief period when anti-colonial nationalists in India and elsewhere were inspired by Wilson’s call for self-determination, and a liberal international order.<sup>31</sup> Hopeful anti-colonial nationalists from colonies such as India, Egypt, Korea, China, Indo-China, and Ireland assembled delegations to send to Paris to lobby for the national sovereignty promised by Wilson’s Fourteen Points. However, as the peace talks progressed, it became increasingly clear to anti-colonial nationalists worldwide that the leaders in Paris, including Wilson, had not intended for the postwar peace and rhetoric of self-determination to extend to the colonies in Asia and Africa. The British government barred the Indian National

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<sup>30</sup> A number of South Asian scholars are grappling with the interwar period (1919-1939) as an “internationalist moment” characterized by a belief in the interconnectedness of the world and a faith and conviction in internationalist forums and models as a means of remaking the future of humanity. I am indebted to papers by and discussions with chair Mrinalini Sinha, and the presenters, Ali Raza, Franziska Roy, Carolien Stolte, and Benjamin Zachariah in the panel “The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views, 1919-1939,” (papers presented at the Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, WI, October 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Erez Manela argues that Wilson’s idealism spread to India, China, Korea, and Egypt, proved to be a catalyst in the anti-colonial uprisings in the 1920s. See his *The Wilsonian Moment*.

Congress-elected delegate, Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920), from attaining a visa to attend the meetings. Instead, the colonial government handpicked two loyalist delegates to represent India, S.P. Sinha, an Indian Civil Service administrator and later under secretary for the colonial government, and Ganga Singh, the Maharaja of the Princely State of Bikaner. Unsurprisingly, both supported British colonial rule in India.

The League of Nations further disillusioned once hopeful anti-colonial nationalists from India and elsewhere by protecting European imperial interests rather than national self-determination. The League established the mandate system and commission to determine the fitness for self-rule of former colonial territories of the dismantled Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires. In reality, it worked as a tool for imperial expansion rather than liberation. Former Ottoman territories were cannibalized and left to the imperial designs of France and Britain. The status of India within the League of Nations was also complicated. The original League of Nations Charter granted India full membership, equal in status with other sovereign nations and British self-governing dominions. As with the Paris delegation, the Indian representatives in the League of Nations, although members with the same privileges as representatives of independent nations, were chosen by the government of India and often supported the official stance of the British raj, not the interests of Indian nationalists.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, League of Nations paperwork marked both India and the Dominion states within the British and French empires as distinctive from other member states with complete

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<sup>32</sup> Older works debate the international status of India in the League of Nations, arguing that their inclusion was a ploy by Britain to gain more power. See D.N. Verma, *India and the League of Nations* (Patna: Bharati Bhawan, 1968); and Vangala Shiva Ram and Brij Mohan Sharma, *India & The League Of Nations* (Lucknow: Upper India Publishing House, 1932).

autonomy.<sup>33</sup> The mark symbolized the marginalize status of India and the Dominions in relation to nation-states within the League of Nations.

When Nehru stayed in Geneva in 1926 and 1927, he observed the sessions of the League of Nations and International Labor Organization and experienced firsthand the exclusion of colonies like India from Geneva's internationalist community. The ongoing debates over the status of India within the League of Nations troubled Nehru so much that he wrote an article in January 1927 for the *Review of Nations* defending India's claim to nationhood as no different from European rights to national sovereignty.<sup>34</sup> Rhetorically Nehru asked why India desired freedom. First, he argued that India was a member of the League of Nations, but the British Government controlled its representation. Second, India was treated like a "political pariah" within the empire and specifically at the Imperial Conferences in the metropole such as the Imperial War Conference (1917-1918).<sup>35</sup> Third, Indians were treated poorly across the empire in places like Kenya and South Africa. But most important, Indians had been stripped of rights and sovereignty at home, while British policies impoverished the subcontinent and imprisoned or exiled the brightest members of its society. The striking feature of this piece, written on the eve of the Brussels Congress, was Nehru's overwhelming sense of exclusion from national, international and imperial spaces.

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<sup>33</sup> I thank Carolyn Bilotft for pointing this out in her comments at the Association of Asian Studies panel, "Internationalizing South and Southeast Asian Colonial History," March 26, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, "The Psychology of Indian Nationalism," in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* vol. 2, (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1972), 259-270. (Hereafter cited as *SWJN*), 259-270.

<sup>35</sup> Nehru, "The Psychology," 268. The Imperial War Conference was an empire-wide meeting in London to discuss a joint war effort. Conveners invited India and recognized its wartime contributions. But, Indian delegates experienced discrimination and exclusion from the decision-making process.

In 1926 Nehru found more productive and inclusive internationalist spaces in Berlin and Paris, cities hosting large communities of expatriates and exiles from the colonies who worked to challenge imperialism from abroad. Since the early twentieth-century, networks of Indians headquartered in Berlin, Paris, Geneva, Moscow, New York, San Francisco, and Tokyo had produced and disseminated anti-imperialist propaganda; recruited sympathizers from the international community; and even concocted conspiratorial plots to arm revolutionaries in India.<sup>36</sup> The growth of such activities outside the South Asian sub-continent had pushed the British government to develop a new department of colonial intelligence, the Indian Political Intelligence Bureau (IPI), to track the movement of Indian revolutionaries, terrorists, and nationalists in places like the United States, Canada, Japan, and continental Europe.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> For the few historical analyses of the expatriate Indian networks before and during World War I and particularly the activities of the India House, see Harald Fischer Tine, "Indian Nationalism and the 'World Forces': Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War," *Journal of Global History*, 2, 3 (November 2007), 325-344; and T. R. Sareen, *Indian Revolutionary Movement Abroad, 1905-1921* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1979). For activities in North America including the Ghadar Party see Harish K. Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organization, and Strategy* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1983); For activities in Berlin see Nirode K. Barooah, *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-imperialist in Europe* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004). For more recent work on Indian travels and networks, see Maia Ramnath, "'The Haj to Utopia': Anti-Colonial Radicalism in the South Asian Diaspora, 1905-1930," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Southern California, Santa Cruz, 2008). For Indian revolutionary activities and International Communism see the classic text, Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Berkeley: University of California, 1959); also, more recently, Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India 1919-1943* (Calcutta: Seribaan, 2006). For an interesting account by an Indian traveling these networks, see Indulal Yagnik, *The Autobiography of Indulal Yagnik*, ed. and trans. from Gujarati to English by Devavrat N. Pathak, Howard Spodek, and John R. Wood (New Delhi: Manohar, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Indian Political Intelligence (IPI) Files, 1912-1950 Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, Micro-film edition, (Leiden: IDC Publishers, 2000). The IPI files are comprised of 624 microfiches; 767 files on 57,811 pages tracking the movement of South Asians outside the Indian sub-continent. The files were released to scholars in 1996. For a brief history of the organization and the files see A.J. Farrington, "Guide: Indian Political Intelligence Files, 1912-1950," (Leiden: IDC Publishers, 2000); and the introduction to Kate O'Malley, *Ireland, India and Empire: Indo-Irish radical connections, 1919-64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

For South Asians, Berlin eclipsed other European cities as a haven for the politically active diaspora. An American observer visiting Berlin in 1927 characterized the city as the European “centre for political activity of Oriental peoples, chiefly against English Imperialism.”<sup>38</sup> During World War I, in fact, the German Foreign Office welcomed anti-British and anti-French activists and employed Indian expatriates in schemes to incite revolts among Indian soldiers in the Middle East and to ship weapons to India to disrupt or at least distract the British wartime effort. The alliance worked well in wartime; however, Indian expatriates found themselves in a peculiar place after the war. The Weimar state saw these communities less as anti-British allies and more as undesirable residents without clearly defined citizenship within Germany or the British Empire.<sup>39</sup> Still, before the rise to power of Hitler and the Nazi regime in the 1930s, Indian expatriates in Berlin continued to operate with some degree of autonomy.

Germany was a hotbed for communist and socialist activities, as well. Postwar ferment and unrest characterized Germany more than other country in Europe. The victors at the Paris Peace settlement assigned Germany sole blame for the Great War and demanded immense reparations. At the same time, the German monarchy abdicated at the end of the war and in its place emerged the Weimar Republic (1918-1933), a state run by an elected parliament (*Reichstag*). Inflation, overwhelming wartime debts, and a weak state had sown discontent among Germans and paved the way for socialists and

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<sup>38</sup> Report written by Roger Nash Baldwin for the International Committee for Political Prisoners dated 13 February 1927, Box 11, Folder 9, Roger Nash Baldwin Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ (hereafter cited as Baldwin Papers).

<sup>39</sup> Benjamin Zachariah, “Indian exiles in Germany c.1914-1946” (paper presented at the Annual Conference on South Asia in Madison Wisconsin, October 2009); Kris K. Manjapra, “The Illusions of Encounter: Muslim ‘Minds’ and Hindu Revolutionaries in First World War Germany and After,” *Journal of Global History* 1, 3 (2006): 363-382; and Barooah, *Chatto*.

communists to garner a strong support base in the 1920s. Although the German Communist Party and the German Social Democrats launched their most caustic attacks against one another, both were equally critical of the diminished place of Germany in the world, as well as the weakness of the Weimar state and economy. The rising power of the German Communist Party (until the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party in 1933) convinced Moscow that the Weimar state would be the next government toppled by communist revolution.

Berlin served as an important meeting space for Indians to encounter communists. There they developed a common framework and shared platform for anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism. To be sure, in the 1920s the Bolshevik Revolution and communism surpassed other interwar internationalisms as a great beacon of hope for many discontented nationalists and leftists from the colonies. The revolution “shook the world” and introduced an internationalist model that sought to destroy the capitalist system through world revolution. V.I. Lenin (1870-1924) offered a salient appeal to the colonies when he argued that imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism and that the struggle against imperialism and capitalism were two sides of the same coin.<sup>40</sup> Famous Indian exiles like M.N. Roy found their way to communism and Moscow in the 1920s, while a burgeoning community of leftists in India sought inspiration and sometimes direction from Moscow, especially after founding the Communist Party of India in 1925.<sup>41</sup> In 1920,

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<sup>40</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1939).

<sup>41</sup> Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*; and Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India*. Histories of the Communist International are lacking in general. For an authoritative introduction, see Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, eds., *The Comintern: A History of International*

at the Second Congress of the Communist International (Comintern), Lenin persuaded his Soviet comrades to pursue a united front alliance with bourgeois nationalist movements in the colonies as a means to encourage anti-imperial revolution first, and class revolution later.<sup>42</sup> Moscow welcomed anti-colonial nationalists from the colonies and encouraged them to join international communism and the common struggle against capitalism and imperialism. Yet the Comintern expected strict and disciplined adherence to Moscow-directed party lines from its junior partners in Asia and Africa. This made cities like Berlin particularly appealing for anti-colonial activists. For much of the united front years (1920-1928), Berlin offered more flexibility and some distance from Moscow for communists and activists from the colonies to meet and collaborate.

Nehru's encounters with Berlin Indians introduced him to the broader community of international anti-imperialists, as well as the plans for the Brussels Congress and League against Imperialism. Berlin organizers chose Brussels as the site for the first international anti-imperialist conference because the Belgian government offered meeting spaces and visas for participants in exchange for a promise that Belgian imperialism would not be discussed and critiqued. The organizers accepted the terms because the French, German and British governments refused to offer accommodations for the event or to provide passport endorsements for travelers. For Nehru, the idea for the Brussels Congress and League against Imperialism appeared to offer an inclusive space that would take the Indian National Congress' demands seriously, an experience he did not enjoy in Geneva or at home in India. The Brussels meeting was also emblematic of the

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*Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997). For M.N. Roy and the Comintern, see Kris Manjapra, *M.N. Roy*.

<sup>42</sup> Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*.

internationalist enthusiasm of the interwar years. It harnessed and directed the enthusiasm for interwar internationalism to address specifically colonial demands for self-rule. The Brussels Congress critiqued the League of Nations, while praising the anti-imperialist ethos of the Comintern's united front alliance with bourgeois nationalist movements in the colonies.<sup>43</sup>

In Brussels and through the League, Nehru encountered and engaged in cross-border dialogue with some of the most revolutionary and politically active state and non-state actors of 1927. The overarching framework of the Brussels Congress specifically drew upon Lenin's conceptualization of imperialism as the extension and highest stage of capitalist competition and the search for raw materials and labor.<sup>44</sup> But this broadly conceived platform to oppose capitalist-imperialist exploitation appealed not only to anti-colonial nationalists, socialists, and communists, but also to sympathetic individuals and organizations waging similar battles to liberate minorities, races, and women from the heavy hand of oppression. Transnational political affiliations of region and religion, like Pan-African, Pan-Asian, Pan-Islamic, and Pan-American communities, also came to Brussels to debate collective means to challenge racial and imperial hegemony. The Brussels platform created a common framework and language of opposition to oppression, one in which exploitation by capitalists-imperialists was viewed as a more universalized form of class, national, racial, ethnic, and minority suppression. It became a site for the linking up of representatives from a wide array of geographic places; state and

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<sup>43</sup> McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*; and Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*.

<sup>44</sup> Lenin, *Imperialism*.



non-state actors; and nation, class, and race based projects.<sup>45</sup> It was a call to “oppressed peoples of the world.”<sup>46</sup> Through the transformative moment of encounter in Brussels and the networks of the League against Imperialism, Nehru increasingly articulated a broader meaning of Indian nationalism, one that fit into the anti-imperialist critique taking place around the world.

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This dissertation traces the ebbs and flows of Nehru’s connections and commitments to international anti-imperialism beginning with his encounters at the Brussels Congress, ones that proved formative to his worldview, activities, and policies for India in the late 1920s and 1930s. The dissertation is organized into six chronological chapters that examine the Brussels Congress and League against Imperialism as a starting point for a set of ideas about India in relation to broader international anti-imperialism during the late colonial and interwar period from 1927 to 1939. Chapter one sketches Nehru’s encounters and engagements at the Brussels Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism in February 1927. The overarching mission of the Brussels Congress was to coordinate a united front against imperialism and capitalism by bringing together high profile nationalists from colonies and dependencies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America with sympathetic organizations and individuals from North America and Europe. At the first meeting in Brussels, Nehru, the INC appointed delegate, encountered influential nationalists, socialists, trade unionists, communists, civil libertarians, and

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<sup>45</sup> Sugata Bose argues that Mohandas Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose formulated their conceptions of nationalism while traveling outside India. It is the interplay of national and universalism that creates their constructions of India. See *A Hundred Horizons*.

<sup>46</sup> Brussels Congress Manifesto, reprinted in “The Brussels Congress against Imperialism and for National Independence” and distributed to League members. Box 8, Folder 2, Baldwin Papers.

legislators from across the globe. Beginning in 1927 with his Brussels encounters, I argue that Nehru's political and intellectual horizon extended beyond the local and national frames to integrate a broader map of anti-imperial resistance worldwide.

Chapter two traces Nehru's executive committee work in the League in the months after the Brussels Congress and before he left Europe for India. During these months, Nehru became one of the most active members of the executive council of the League against Imperialism. It is commonly assumed that Nehru engaged European ideas and values at the Brussels Congress and League, and afterward he appropriated and applied these derivatives to the Indian condition.<sup>47</sup> However, I argue that his construction of Indian nationalism and international anti-imperialism were not derivatives of some abstract notion drawn from European epistemology. Rather it is a set of ideas about India and the international world that he created in dialogue with an international community of anti-imperialists with the League.

Nehru's two-year sojourn in Europe expanded his geography of anti-imperial resistance beyond the confines of India and even the British Empire. As a consequence of his encounters in Brussels and through the League, he sought national sovereignty and membership in an international community of nations. He likewise envisaged India's struggle against the raj as an inseparable part of an international struggle against capitalism-imperialism. Chapter three examines Nehru's strategies to incorporate the League's ideas, models, and networks into the everyday practices of the INC after he returned to India in December 1927. The chapter also underscores the resistance Nehru

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<sup>47</sup> For example, Sarvepalli Gopal argues that Nehru's experience in Brussels was an encounter with "European radical tradition" and Nehru sought to appropriate and apply European doctrine to India. See his *Jawaharlal Nehru*, p.58.

encountered from the INC in his attempt to win support for independence – as distinct from Dominion Status - as the Congress goal. At the same time, the chapter maps the intellectual and political bridges Nehru constructed as a means to link India to the individuals and organizations he encountered in Brussels and through the League.

Chapter four brings Nehru's anti-imperial relationship with the League's center to a crisis point with two climatic events. First, in the Meerut Conspiracy Case (1929-1933), the government of India imprisoned and accused thirty-two men - three European-born and twenty-nine Indian-born - of conspiracy for their membership in communist-inspired organizations like the League against Imperialism. The British national section of the League formed defense committees for the Meerut accused in the hopes of a global, anti-imperial intervention, while the Indian National Congress Working Committee pulled together a powerful, 'dream team' of lawyers to represent the defendants. The trial became a highly publicized space for the Government of India to flex the muscle of the colonial state and show nationalists like Nehru the consequences of forging "foreign connections" that operated outside the margins of imperial servitude. At the same time, the Comintern seized control of the League against Imperialism and began excommunicating members unwilling to tow the communist line. Until 1929 the League remained financially and politically independent of Moscow, but as member-donated funds dried up, the Comintern gradually took a more active financial and political role. The shift took place as Comintern policy evolved from a united front strategy to one antagonistic to bourgeois nationalism in the colonies. By January 1930 Nehru and the League split, and his vision of solidarity among anti-imperialists abroad and nationalists at home lay in ruins.

Chapter five highlights the continuities of Nehru's international worldview and global geography of anti-imperialism as they were represented in his first substantial publication, *Glimpses of World History* (1934). Written from prison between 1930 and 1934, *Glimpses* was the product of Nehru's exploration of world history as a means to strengthen the internationalist ideas that he had developed since the days of the Brussels Congress and League against Imperialism. It casts the world as a struggle between the forces of capitalism-imperialism and its anti-imperialist opponents. It also reveals Nehru's early attempts to confront fascism. I argue that despite the changing landscape of the world in the 1930s, Nehru's international anti-imperialist logic continued to inform and shape his response to new situations and forces sweeping across the globe.

The final chapter argues that despite his breakup with the League and a nearly five-year stint in prison during the civil disobedience campaigns (1930-1931, and again in 1932-1934), Nehru's ideas about Indian nationalism and its relationship to the world remained consistent with his late 1920s internationalism. The chapter reveals that the anti-imperial relationships Nehru maintained with former Leaguers flourished and even expanded in the 1930s and beyond. Nehru's activities and decisions within the Congress also cleaved closely to his international anti-imperialists activities of the late 1920s. The chapter ends with the coming of the Second World War and the channeling of international anti-imperialism into broader united fronts against fascism. In the context of the 1930s, internationalist-minded activists began working for anti-war and anti-fascist campaigns. On the eve of the Second World War, Nehru drew upon the familiar united front logic from the League days to argue that colonialism still remained the pivotal issue and problem for the world's anti-capitalism, anti-fascism, and anti-war campaigns. But

the war ushered in repressive measures by the raj, and the Quit India movement commenced; Nehru and nearly all of the INC leaders were imprisoned and isolated from the international community once again. Still, when Nehru and the INC leaders reemerged from prison in 1945, the transfer of power opened unprecedented opportunities for India to connect with the world and geography of anti-imperialism.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THE BRUSSELS CONGRESS AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF ANTI-IMPERIALISM**

In May 1927 the *Modern Review*, a Calcutta-based publication for the Indian intelligentsia, ran an article on the Brussels Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism. It captured a common message – a Marxist one - shared by those attending the event: “The character of the Congress was unique; for it was the first time in history that the representatives of the working class and of subject peoples assembled under the same roof to express the message of the enslaved: ‘Brothers! Your suffering is my suffering. Let us unite, for we have nothing more to lose but our chains and a world to gain.’”<sup>1</sup> Not since the Paris Peace settlement in the aftermath of World War I had an event drummed up as much faith in the international community among anti-colonial nationalists as had the Brussels Congress. The event attracted considerable attention and optimistic appraisals from international and European leftist publications.<sup>2</sup> European colonial intelligence communities tracked the meeting closely and expressed grave anxieties about this burgeoning international anti-imperial community.<sup>3</sup> The Brussels Congress had created a nexus of politically active revolutionaries, reformers, intellectuals, and politicians sympathetic to the plight of the anti-colonial struggles taking

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<sup>1</sup> Bakar Ali Mirza, “The Congress against Imperialism,” *Modern Review*, May 1927, File 25, Papers of Reginald Francis Orlando Bridgeman (1884-1968), Hull University Archives, United Kingdom.

<sup>2</sup> For a very brief discussion of coverage of the Brussels Congress in Europe, see Nehru, “Note for the Working Committee,” 7 March 1927, *SWJN*, vol. 2, 299.

<sup>3</sup> See the League against Imperialism Files, Fiche 328, Indian Political Intelligence (IPI) Files, 1912-1950 Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, Micro-film edition, (Leiden: IDC Publishers, 2000). (henceforth IPI Papers).

place across the world. The Brussels Congress became a meeting space of encounter and connection for those suffering the oppression of class, race, and nation. Through the meetings and encounters in Brussels, the geography of anti-colonial resistance expanded beyond the local and national frames and onto the world stage.

This chapter seeks to unpack the elements of Nehru's internationalist orientation that emerged out of his attendance and participation in the Brussels Congress.<sup>4</sup> Specialists of Nehru have only skimmed the surface of the rich and complex history of his engagements and connections at Brussels. Gopal's oft-cited biography argues that the Brussels Congress transformed Nehru, but "it is significant that the change was wrought not by the revolutionary situation in India but by what he saw and heard and read in Europe. Jawaharlal was always a radical in the European tradition, seeking to apply and adapt its doctrine to his own country."<sup>5</sup> However, the Brussels Congress evolved from the complex currents of the 1920s internationalist world, and the event was hardly a European enterprise. The Brussels Congress may have taken place in Europe, but those contributors involved in the making of international anti-imperialism were often not European. Recent biographical research on Nehru by Benjamin Zachariah more accurately characterizes his encounters at Brussels as the "the beginning of his close relationship with the international left."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Nehru attended the Brussels Congress as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress. He stayed in Europe for nearly two years, from March 1926 to December 1927, to attend to his sick wife.

<sup>5</sup> Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, 58.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru* (London: Routledge Press, 2004), 60.

The aim of this chapter is to explore in more detail the specific contours of Nehru's internationalism in two ways. First, this chapter considers the Brussels Congress as a catalyst in Nehru's formulations of Indian nationalism and its place in the world struggle against empires. I argue that because of his encounters and discussions at Brussels, Nehru no longer considered Dominion Status within the British Empire as an adequate possibility and status for India. Rather Indian nationalism had to seek the freedom to join international communities like the one forming in Brussels and through the League. Secondly, I consider the more specific connections Nehru developed between India and other anti-imperial forces within the meeting spaces of Brussels. It is important to think critically about Nehru's reworking of Indian nationalism in relation to the people and places he came to consider his most valuable partners against imperialism. Nehru began to construct an international geography of anti-imperial resistance that extended beyond the Indian sub-continent to places as spatially distant as China, Indonesia, Egypt, Latin America, the United States and Soviet Russia. Because few studies of the Brussels Congress and League against Imperialism exist, a brief sketch of its origins is necessary.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.1 From Allahabad to Brussels

The story of Nehru and the Brussels Congress is one about encounters between people brought together in the international meeting spaces and contact zones of postwar Europe. What made the Brussels Congress so transformative for Nehru was not so much

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<sup>7</sup> Few historical accounts of the League against Imperialism exist. For its historiography, see the introduction of this manuscript, Footnote 5.



the abstract and theoretical ideas he encountered, but the people he met. His personal and professional views were shaped less by coherent and fixed ideologies like communism or socialism, but rather by socialists and communists he encountered at the Brussels Congress and through the League. As a consequence of his encounters, Nehru reworked his ideas about Indian nationalism and independence came to be entangled with the freedom for India to forge connections with an international community of anti-imperial colleagues.

Personally, Nehru was a person transformed by encounters. He gained energy and learned from the people around him, and already personal encounters and meetings within the local and provincial landscape of India had been transformative for him in the early 1920s. His biography has already been well documented.<sup>8</sup> Before the 1920s, Nehru remained a dutiful son that followed his father's wishes for his career and personal life. His father, Motilal Nehru, amassed great wealth as a barrister and later joined the Indian National Congress movement as a means to lobby for constitutional reforms within an existing colonial state and framework. Motilal intended for young Nehru to use his metropolitan education from Harrow and Cambridge, as well as his legal training in London, in the service of the British Empire. It was Motilal's great hope that Jawaharlal would join the Indian Civil Service, an elite and prestigious cadre of colonial

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<sup>8</sup> There are many biographies, some already cited in the Introduction to this manuscript. The classic text on Nehru is S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*; for one of the few biographies that gained access to Nehru's postcolonial papers (ones that remain closed to scholars and the general public), see Judith M. Brown, *Nehru: A Political Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); for a recent analysis, see Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru*.

administrators. Nehru's less than stellar performance in school, however, failed to qualify him to take the ICS entry exam. He returned to India to practice law instead.

Nehru's personal transformation from a dutiful son to politicized nationalist leader began through his encounters locally in the 1920s. Motilal's only son began to shift away from service to the empire and toward a more radical critique of colonial rule – much to his father's chagrin - when Jawaharlal met Mohandas K. Gandhi in 1916 and began forging a lifelong, although often contentious, partnership with him against the British raj. Gandhi became a father-like figure and political mentor to Jawaharlal over time, and in the early 1920s, biographers rightly characterize Nehru as a loyal and obedient “disciple” of Gandhi.<sup>9</sup> His encounters with the *kisans* (peasants) in the U.P. proved to be significant for the young Nehru as well. In 1920 in his hometown, Allahabad, over 200 *kisans* marched from the countryside to the city to protest the poor treatment and excessive rent charged by Indian landlords. Nehru went with the *kisans* to the village; and he later remembered this trip as a moment of “revelation.” He wrote that a “new picture of India seemed to rise before me... And the villagers' faith in us, casual visitors from the distant city, embarrassed me and filled me with a new responsibility that frightened me.”<sup>10</sup> Nehru took up the cause of the peasantry with great zeal, and when the Non-cooperation campaign (1920-1922) kicked off, he was instrumental in drawing the U.P. *kisans* into the movement. Nehru's charismatic appeal and ability to draw large

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<sup>9</sup> Gopal, *Nehru*, 30-37.

<sup>10</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 57.

crowds of supporters had earned him a reputation within the INC as one of its strongest campaigners for Non-cooperation.

Before Nehru left for Europe, the Indian National Congress had been riven by internal factionalism after Gandhi called off the Non-cooperation campaign at its height when violence broke out in Chauri Chaura. The Hindu-Muslim unity of the Non-cooperation campaign (1920-1922) gave way to communal tensions and riots. After the campaign from March 1922 to February 1924, Gandhi remained incarcerated as a political prisoner. In his absence, deep divisions emerged either among the leaders of the INC over the plan for action after Non-cooperation. Many who had given up successful careers and posh lifestyles for the struggle for *swaraj* in 1920 – like Motilal - found Gandhi's abrupt abandonment of the campaign in 1922 a bitter pill to swallow. Without direction for several years, the INC splintered into two factions. The *Swaraj* Party, led by Motilal Nehru and a Bengali Congressmen, C.R. Das, sought reentry into the provincial legislatures as a means to wreck the colonial state from within the existing system. Legislative council members did so by creating deadlocks and exposing the colonial state as a repressive regime. Opposing the *Swaraj* Party, the "no-changers" like Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, and C. Rajagopalchari argued for the continuation of Gandhi's program of boycotting British institutions, including the legislatures, while also preparing for another Non-cooperation movement through grass-roots constructive programs. Gandhi managed to bring the *swarajists* and no-changers together within the INC fold after his release from prison in November 1924, but the two camps continued to work

separately.<sup>11</sup> When Nehru left India, as he later recalled in his autobiography, he welcomed the break from the internal politics of the INC: “I wanted an excuse to go out of India... My mind was befogged, and no clear path was visible; and I thought that, perhaps, if I was far from India I could see things in better perspective and lighten up the dark corners of my mind.”<sup>12</sup> The European sojourn not only enlightened the “dark corners” of his mind, but it also radically shifted his understanding of anti-colonial nationalism and its connections with anti-imperialist forces worldwide.

As a young and charismatic leader driven by encounters – with Gandhi and leaders of the U.P. *kisan* movement - Nehru’s personal transformation continued in Europe in 1926 when he met other charismatic individuals like Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, one of the most influential and politically active Indian exiles in Berlin. A chance trip to Berlin in November 1926 provided Nehru an opportunity to meet Chatto, as his colleagues called him. Of the Indian expatriates Nehru encountered throughout his nearly two year European sojourn, he most enjoyed the company of Chatto and admired his work and vision.<sup>13</sup> Slightly senior to Nehru, Chatto came from a wealthy Bengali family living in Hyderabad that included his sister Sarojini Naidu, an influential Gandhian nationalist and poetess. Chatto traveled to London in 1902 to take the Indian Civil Service Exam. After failing it twice, he decided to study law instead. When Chatto joined the infamous India House, a London-based militant organization of diasporic Indians and

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<sup>11</sup> For a comprehensive history of the Indian National Congress movement in the 1920s, see Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence, 1857-1947* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 155.

<sup>13</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *Autobiography*, 162.

students, his life moved in a different direction, away from service within the empire and toward a more revolutionary critique of the British in India.<sup>14</sup> Following the assassination of Sir Curzon Wylie and the implication that key members of the India House were responsible, Chatto fled London in 1910, settling first in Paris, 1910-1914, then permanently in Berlin with a brief interlude in Stockholm, 1917-1921.<sup>15</sup> In Berlin, Chatto developed an anti-British collaborative relationship with the German government. Before and during the First World War, the German government financed Chatto's schemes against the British, including expeditions to incite rebellion and mutiny among Indian soldiers stationed in Baghdad, Kabul and the Suez Canal. Chatto even attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to transport arms to revolutionaries in India. His efforts established Chatto as one of the most influential Berlin Indians, and British intelligence carefully documented his every move.<sup>16</sup>

After World War I, the Germans were in no position to assist Chatto and the Berlin Indians, forcing him to search for funds and assistance from a new source, the Soviet Union. He arranged for a delegation of Berlin Indians to travel to Moscow in May 1921, and make a case for Soviet support of the Indian nationalist cause. Spending four

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<sup>14</sup> Harald Fischer-Tiné, "Indian Nationalism and the 'World Forces': Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War," *Journal of Global History*, 2, 3 (November 2007), 325-344.

<sup>15</sup> Archival sources on Chatto's life are scattered across many archives, and only one biography of him exists. See Nirode K. Barooah, *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> IPI Note on Virendranath Chattopadyaya, League against Imperialism Files, Fiche 328, Indian Political Intelligence (IPI) Files, 1912-1950 Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, Microfilm edition, (Leiden: IDC Publishers, 2000). (henceforth IPI Papers).

months in Moscow, Chatto encountered high-ranking Soviets, and spoke before the Third Congress of the Comintern in July. But rivalry between Chatto and M.N. Roy, the Comintern's chosen representative for Indian affairs since the First Congress in 1920, divided the Indian anti-colonial nationalists and revolutionaries in Moscow and Berlin. Chatto sought to work with the nationalist movement in India, while Roy argued that the Comintern ought to concentrate on building and strengthening an Indian Communist Party. Despite the Comintern's united front alliance with bourgeois nationalists, Roy effectively persuaded the Comintern of his credentials to lead Soviet policies toward India, and Chatto returned to Berlin in late 1921 without Moscow's blessing or money.<sup>17</sup> M.N. Roy also left Moscow for Berlin, in 1928, to propagate his ideas about communism and India.

Through his friendship with leading figures of the German Communist Party like Willi Muenzenberg, Chatto found a new venue for reconnecting with the Comintern and with a politically active coalition of anti-imperial activists and sympathizers in Berlin. Credited as the driving force behind the Brussels Congress and League against Imperialism, Muenzenberg envisioned the Brussels Congress and League as communist tools to "win the hearts and minds" of nationalists from the colonies. Muenzenberg had a deep and rich history with the Bolsheviks. He traveled with Lenin to Russia on the eve of the revolution, and in 1920, Lenin secretly appointed Muenzenberg to be the chief

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<sup>17</sup> Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*.

propagandist for the Comintern in Western Europe.<sup>18</sup> When Muenzenberg settled in Berlin, he entered politics as a part of the German Communist Party and served as a member of the Weimar Republic's *Reichstag*. Muenzenberg had many communist-inspired projects and he began linking up communists and anti-colonial activists in Berlin in 1925 when he embarked on a campaign to aid Chinese nationalists against foreign capitalists. By 1926, Chatto and Muenzenberg worked collaboratively to bring together Indian exiles with communists in Berlin, and from this alliance came plans for the international anti-imperialist conference in Brussels and the League.

The Communist International in Moscow also had a hand in the plans for the Brussels Congress. When Muenzenberg initially pitched his idea to the Comintern in February 1926, Moscow was reluctant to support the project. However, news that the Indian National Congress decided to send Nehru as their representative had enticed the Soviets to reconsider. Still, while the Comintern supplied moral support and ideological guidance, it did not fund the Brussels Congress, leaving the responsibility mostly to the Chinese and Mexican delegations.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, Muenzenberg consulted Moscow on every decision for the plans, and the Comintern sent directives that the Brussels Congress was “to act as a neutral intermediary between the Communist International and

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<sup>18</sup> Sean McMeekin, *The Red Millionaire: A Political Biography of Willi Münzenberg, Moscow's Secret Propaganda Tsar in the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); and Stephen Koch, *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg, and the Seduction of the Intellectuals* (New York: Enigma Books, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Nehru, Report on Brussels Congress, 19 February 1927, *SWJN*, vol.2, 278-297.

nationalist movements in the colonies.”<sup>20</sup> Moscow would “give the general political direction of the Congress and of the work in connection with it.”<sup>21</sup> However, like most united front organizations, the Brussels Congress and the League were presented as a benevolent humanitarian project, politically unaffiliated, with little overt evidence of Moscow’s hand in guiding their every step.

There is little doubt that the architects of the Brussels Congress saw the INC participation as a coveted prize in the overall scheme for the League against Imperialism, and Nehru also shared with his Berlin colleagues an enthusiasm for the possibility of a platform bringing together anti-imperialist forces worldwide.<sup>22</sup> In November 1926 he wrote to the Indian National Congress (INC) to request a large and representative Indian delegation be sent to the Brussels Congress. But after consideration, the INC sent a mandate to Nehru to be the sole spokesman for the Indian nationalist movement.<sup>23</sup> With

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<sup>20</sup> ECCI to Muenzenberg, 29 May 1926, in the Communist International Papers, Russian State Archive of Political and Social History (RAGSPI), Digitized and available at the Library of Congress, European Reading Room, Washington D.C. (Hereafter cited as CI Papers). Comintern papers are organized in the following manner: Fond/Opis/Delo/List, and the League against Imperialism papers are found in Fond 542. For this particular passage see 542/1/3/10-11, CI Papers.

<sup>21</sup> ECCI to Muenzenberg, 2 July 1926, 542/1/3/15, CI Papers.

<sup>22</sup> ECCI to Muenzenberg, 2 July 1926, 542/1/3/15-17, CI Papers. The letter underscored the importance of delegates “straight from the colonies” that were “accredited representatives of important political organizations. Special reference is made of India in this letter.

<sup>23</sup> Nehru first wrote about the Brussels Congress to his father, Motilal Nehru, and he asked that Motilal persuade the INC Working Committee to appoint a delegation to the meeting. See, Jawaharlal Nehru to his father, 16 November 1926, *SWJN*, vol. 2, 250-251. After the elder Nehru proposed the INC send a delegation, the AICC Secretary sent the official appointment to Nehru on January 6, 1927. The appointment letter to Nehru also included a draft for 50 Pounds Sterling for Nehru’s expenses to attend the Brussels Congress on behalf of the INC. For INC deliberations on this see, File G21-1926, All-India Congress Committee Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi, India. (hereafter cited as AICC Papers).



little more direction outside the one-line appointment letter from the INC, Nehru boarded a train and embarked on a journey to Brussels that would change the contours of his political and intellectual horizon for decades to come.

## 2.2 The Main Event

The inaugural session of the Brussels Congress commenced on the evening of the 10<sup>th</sup> of February in the Palais Egmont, a building furnished by the Belgian Government. The sessions opened with messages of support from such high profile figures of the interwar period as Albert Einstein of Germany, Ernst Toller of Poland, Romain Rolland of France, Upton Sinclair of the United States, Maxim Gorki of Russia, and Victor Margueritte of French Algeria. Other messages came from political figures like Mohandas K. Gandhi of India, Clara Zetkin of Germany, and Madame Sun Yat-Sen of China. French writer and communist, Henri Barbusse, was the first to the podium and his passionate speech calling the delegates of Brussels “soldiers of emancipation” moved the audience to cheers and expressions of camaraderie.<sup>24</sup> Speakers from the oppressed nations took the podium after Barbusse: Liau Hansin of the Central Executive committee of China’s Kuomintang Party; Jawaharlal Nehru of the Indian National Congress; and Jose Vasconcelos, former education minister (1921-1924) of Mexico and later presidential candidate in the 1929 national elections. The first session ended with words from a communist and a socialist: Sen Katayama, co-founder of the Japanese Communist

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<sup>24</sup> “Revolutionary Movements in the Colonies” *International Press Correspondence* 16 (1927): 328-331. Labour History Archive and Study Center (People’s History Museum), File 183, Manchester, United Kingdom.

Party; and Fenner Brockway, member of the British Independent Labour Party and editor of its flagship journal, *Labour Leader*. The remaining eight sessions stretched out over the next five days and opened the floor to delegates from Egypt, Indonesia, South Africa, Algeria, Tunis, Morocco, Persia, Indo-China, Syria, Korea, United States, France, Germany, Italy, and Britain. Each speaker either pointed to the atrocities of imperialism and capitalism in their respective country, or professed the support of workers, civil libertarians, and pacifists for the national emancipation movements in the colonies.

As the “jewel in Britain’s crown,” India took center stage at Brussels, and Nehru played a key role in the meetings. He already had a working knowledge of political organization and administration on the local and national levels, so his arrival in Brussels provided opportunity for him to test his skills on the international terrain. Nehru did not disappoint his internationalist colleagues. He drafted several resolutions, chaired sessions, and served on the executive committee from 1927 to 1930. Nehru even arrived in Brussels ahead of the opening sessions in order to take part in the preliminary meetings. Nehru was not the only South Asian in attendance. A host of characters came to the Brussels Congress from the South Asian diaspora, mainly expatriates and exiles living in Europe and North America in the 1920s. But Nehru alone spoke at Brussels and articulated publicly the position of Indian nationalism. Speaking on behalf of the Indian National Congress, Nehru presented the INC goal of *swaraj* to mean complete independence from Britain rather than greater autonomy within the empire, although these distinctions remained a contentiously debated issue in India. Nehru’s greatest contribution to the Brussels Congress was the drafting of three key resolutions: one on

the conditions in India; the second on solidarity between India and China; and one on cooperation between Indian, Chinese, and British anti-imperialists. All spoke to the growing necessity to challenge the British Empire within and beyond the borders of India.

Aside from India, the Brussels Congress highlighted two other sites of anti-imperial resistance - China and Mexico, an odd pairing given that India was the only formal colony controlled by an imperial power. But, this three-site focus underscored the premise that, in the eyes of the League, empire was not only a political, but also an economic project that exploited less developed economies in places like Latin America and China. The Mexican and Latin American presence also demonstrated the recognition of a threatening U.S. imperialism. The Brussels Congress resolution on imperialism outlined two kinds of “exploited colonial territories”: “(1) Completely subjected countries which are governed by the motherland through its colonial bureaucracy. (2) Nominally independent countries, but which have been brought into actual dependence upon the imperialist powers through treaties forced upon them, and which represent a state of equal exploitation.”<sup>25</sup>

The Brussels Congress also harnessed the frustration of many anti-colonial nationalists with the League of Nations for its neglect and exclusion of Asian and African colonies, dependencies, and mandates. Nearly every delegate at Brussels spoke of the failures of the League of Nations, and the hope for alternative international institutions

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<sup>25</sup> “Resolution on Imperialism,” 10-15 February 1927, Brussels Congress against Colonialism and Imperialism, File G21-1926, AICC Papers.

for colonies seeking national sovereignty. One delegate argued, “The presence of delegations of the greatest organizations of the movement for colonial emancipation and the organizations of the working class of the imperialist countries, at this congress, demonstrates that the first steps toward the formation of a real League of Nations have been made, not in Geneva, but here in Brussels.”<sup>26</sup> In his report to the INC, Nehru was skeptical of the claim that the League against Imperialism, inaugurated at the Brussels Congress, might one day replace the League of Nations, but even he admitted that “there is a germ of truth in it and it is in the interest of the Indian Congress to be associated with an organization which might play a big role in the future.”<sup>27</sup>

At Brussels, Nehru made two formal statements on the Indian situation, one to the press on the eve of the Congress and one to the delegation at the opening session. In both, he positioned India at the forefront of the world struggle against imperialism: “India is a world problem and as in the past so in the future other countries and peoples will be vitally affected by the condition of India.”<sup>28</sup> He argued that the British not only depended on Indian resources and labor to manage the empire, but also that Britain’s imperial expansion into Africa, and Egypt in particular, was a maneuver to ensure safe passage of goods between the metropole and its “crown jewel.” Nehru concluded: “What it will be in the future, if and when India becomes independent, I cannot say, but certainly the

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<sup>26</sup> Report, “The Brussels Congress against Imperialism and for National Independence,” League against Imperialism Secretariat, Berlin, (1929), Box 8, Folder 2, Baldwin Papers.

<sup>27</sup> Nehru, Report on Brussels Congress, *SWJN*, Vol. 2, p. 287.

<sup>28</sup> Nehru, Press Statement made in Brussels on 9 February 1927, reprinted in *SWJN*, vol. 2, 270.

British Empire would cease to exist.”<sup>29</sup> Consequently, India’s independence would be the catalyst for a new era of a world freed from imperialist and capitalist chains.

It had been very disheartening for Nehru to meet his fellow comrades from the colonized world and realize that the most common encounters many had with India had been with Indian soldiers and police officers manning the British Empire. By 1927, Indian soldiers worked in the service of the British Empire in China, Egypt, Abyssinia, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Syria, Georgia, Tibet, Afghanistan, and Burma. Nehru was especially concerned about the use of Indian troops to intervene in the internal affairs of China on behalf of British imperial interests. “It has been a matter of shame and sorrow to us that the British Government should venture to send Indian troops to China in an attempt to coerce the Chinese... imperialism is trying to utilise one subject country to coerce another but in spite of her weakness India is not so weak today as to permit herself to be employed as a pawn in the imperialist game.”<sup>30</sup> For Nehru, the “divide and rule” trope commonly applied to the ways the British ruled India by encouraging communal tensions was now being applied to the colonized world. The British Empire divided colonies, too, as a means to weaken resistance and ensure global hegemony.

Nehru’s statements in the opening sessions were not uncommon to both imperialists and Indian anti-colonial nationalists alike who also deployed arguments about the centrality of India as Britain’s “crown jewel.” Enthusiasts of the empire often defended expansion into places like the Suez Canal as a necessary maneuver to protect

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<sup>29</sup> Nehru, Speech made at the Brussels Congress general sessions, 10 February 1927, *SWJN*, vol.2, 275.

<sup>30</sup> Nehru, Speech, 271.

interests and passages to India. More moderate members of organizations like the INC also used the prominent place of the “crown jewel” in the British Empire to argue for more resources from the metropole. Nehru came to refine this argument as the proceedings developed in Brussels and especially as he began to learn about other places in the world that waged similar struggles. The meetings introduced him to ideas and individuals from other anti-colonial movements within but also beyond the British Empire, as well as the critique of imperialism launched by the socialist and communist fronts of the 1920s. Through these encounters, Nehru came to consider a deeper and more fundamental shift in his thinking about India and the world. By the end of the Brussels Congress, Nehru began to argue that an isolated Indian struggle alone could not bring down the empire. The INC’s struggle would be more effective if India worked collaboratively with the anti-imperial community worldwide to challenge empire internationally.

### 2.3 Indian Nationalism in an Anti-Imperialist International World

The Brussels Congress profoundly changed the possibilities for Nehru to contest the British Empire. Rather than seeking membership as a Dominion State within the empire-state system, Nehru’s nationalism claimed nationhood and the right to seek out membership in an international anti-imperial community.<sup>31</sup> These international channels

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<sup>31</sup> The British Empire before World War I was comprised of what John Darwin calls a “tripartite world system.” This included three types of colonial territories: First, Dominion States like Canada, Australia, New Zealand and later South Africa and Ireland. Each had local autonomy but conceded defense, external relations and constitutional change to the metropole. Second, the dependent empire (including India) comprised of directly ruled colonial states. Third, an “informal empire” of commercial and strategic

and forums of the Brussels Congress and League bypassed the metropole and appealed directly to alternative centers of power and public opinion outside the empire and metropole, while also claiming nationalism not in relation to the empire, but in relation to other nationalisms and nation-states. This is a paradigmatic shift that is critical but often overlooked in colonial and imperial studies. As the internationalist framework for world politics emerged as an alternative to the world of empires, nationalists could recast anti-colonial resistance from claims for self-rule within an empire to independence within a community of nations. This shift was likely a combination of factors in the 1920s that included the weakening empire after the Great War, stronger pressure from Dominions for fuller independence, and also the rise alternative interwar international organizations and platforms for colonies to lobby for independence including the League against Imperialism, League of Nations, and Comintern.

Events like the Brussels Congress enabled Nehru to rethink Indian nationalist goals, methodology, and connections abroad. On the issue of goals, the INC in the 1920s sought to challenge the raj for more self-government *within* the British Empire. Nehru came to consider self-government *within* the empire as a limited and narrow-minded vision. Certainly, Nehru was not the only INC leader seeking to radicalize the Congress

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interest sustained by private enterprise and backed by diplomacy and sometimes force. After World War I, the Dominions States remained within the empire but negotiated their own control of constitutional change leaving only external affairs and defense to the metropole. Metropolitan constitutional reforms for India after the war considered the preparedness and timetable for India to be a Dominion State within the Empire at an undefined time in the future. For a history of Dominion States in the twentieth-century see, for example John Darwin, "A Third British Empire? The Dominion Idea in Imperial Politics" in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 4, *The Twentieth Century*, ed. by Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 64-87.

program and push for independence over Dominion Status. But Nehru defined Indian nationalism not only as complete independence from the British, but also freedom to join a world of nations. This internationalist aspect was more unique compared to others in India with a more local vision. For example, in his report to the INC on the Brussels Congress, he argued that “our contact with the rest of the world is bound to increase and it is neither possible nor desirable for us to try to maintain our isolation... we are now connected with the outside world practically through England and the English language only and our ideas of the world naturally tend to become lopsided and perverted.”<sup>32</sup>

Writing to his father shortly after the Brussels Congress, Nehru argued for a broader vision of *swaraj* as independence. It meant the freedom to develop both: “the external relations of our country and the internal organization.”<sup>33</sup> India should be able to choose whether to maintain a relationship with Britain, and whether to establish cooperative relations with other places like China. “Thus all the rights that an independent country enjoys in this respect should be those of our country also. To say even now that we shall always be associated with England, as a Dominion or in some other form, seems to me inappropriate, for it lessens our freedom of choice in the future... I hope that after gaining freedom we shall use our energy for extending peace in the world.”<sup>34</sup> The vision Nehru expressed here echoes the sentiments of the Brussels

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<sup>32</sup> Nehru, Report on Brussels Congress, *SWJN*, vol.2, 291.

<sup>33</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, “On the Indian Situation,” published in *Aaj*, 2 March 1927, repr. in *SWJN*, vol. 2, 297.

<sup>34</sup> Nehru, “Indian Situation,” 297.



Congress, but also the closure of a moment when Nehru found Dominion Status and empire-states “appropriate” for India or the international world.

Nehru also became equally certain that the means to contest British control had to extend beyond the confines of the national landscape. The INC officially abandoned foreign propaganda projects in 1923 under a resolution moved by Nehru’s father.<sup>35</sup> This motion had been informed by a highly contentious power struggle between the INC and the metropolitan British Committee of the Indian National Congress (BCINC).<sup>36</sup> The British Committee of the INC was a London-based group of mainly British sympathizers from the Labour Party that worked under the name and mandate of the Congress, but often operated autonomously. The British Committee envisioned themselves as paternal supervisors of the INC, and British members argued that the BCINC should determine the course for Congress policies and activities in India. Indeed, the British Committee did not seek to represent the voice of the INC abroad, but rather dictate nationalist policy to the INC from London. The Congress broke relations and disaffiliated with the British Committee in 1923, a move that ended the INC’s international work until Nehru revived it in 1927. Nehru thought the newly minted League against Imperialism provided the perfect vehicle to inform a broader international community of the conditions in India and the atrocities of the British. In his report on Brussels to the INC, Nehru considered the advantages of affiliation with the League to be the “opportunities to keep in touch

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<sup>35</sup> Nicholas Owen, *The British Left and India: Metropolitan Anti-imperialism, 1885-1947*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> See Nicholas Owen, *The British Left and India*; and Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

with many Asiatic and other countries with problems not dissimilar to ours, and the use of the League as a very efficient means of propaganda and publicity.” He continued, “We have discussed the question of foreign propaganda for a long time in the Indian Congress but for various obvious reasons nothing much has been done...if we can take advantage of another organization to do this work for us without our spending much money or energy over it, there seems to be no reason why we should not avail ourselves of it.”<sup>37</sup>

Beyond propaganda, the world situation could also pressure the INC to build a national consensus at home. After all, Nehru and India had a great responsibility not only to Indians locally, but also to the anti-imperial world. Brussels reminded Nehru that a united India was a prerequisite for the international anti-imperial campaign and a world of greater equality. From Europe, Nehru drafted myriad articles and letters to warn his fellow INC comrades of the “dangers of narrow-minded nationalism.”<sup>38</sup> He wrote in his report on the Brussels Congress: “The Congress [INC] must therefore take cognizance of the forces and policies that are shaping the future of the world and lay down its own policy and programme accordingly... else our best laid plans will break down and we will find ourselves suddenly faced with crises for which we are wholly unprepared or even stampeded into a war for the support of the very system against which we are contending.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Nehru, Report on Brussels Congress, *SWJN* vol. 2, 287.

<sup>38</sup> He often deployed this critique of the Indian National Congress in his writings in 1927. See for example, Nehru, “On the Indian Situation,” in *SWJN*, vol. 2, 297.

<sup>39</sup> Nehru, “Report on Brussels Congress,” *SWJN*, vol. 2, 293.

Nehru considered the postwar world too interconnected for any one place – colony or nation – to act in isolation. Anti-imperialist forces must work together. Interestingly at Brussels, Nehru drew upon Gandhi’s words, an Indian nationalist not known for his interest in internationalism, to argue that Indian anti-colonial nationalism was intimately linked to the international world. He pointed out: “the Indian National Congress is necessarily national and has nationalism as its basis, but as our great leader Gandhi has said, our nationalism is based on the most intense internationalism. The problem of Indian freedom is for us vital and urgently essential, but at the same time it is not merely a purely national, problem.”<sup>40</sup> Here, Nehru referred to a 1925 statement by the Mahatma: “It is impossible for one to be internationalist without being a nationalist... It is not nationalism that is evil, it is the narrowness, selfishness, exclusiveness, which is the bane of modern nations, which is evil.... India has, I hope, struck a different path. It wants to organize itself or to find full self-expression for the benefit and service of humanity at large.”<sup>41</sup>

Gandhi and Nehru differed considerably in their views of internationalism and India’s role in the world. For Gandhi, India’s role in the world was to model exemplary action. He envisaged *swaraj* as a program of social and national reform that would be a model for others to emulate. Living a life of truth (*ahisma*) through non-violence (*satyagraha*) would not only free India of British rule, but also pave the path for others to

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<sup>40</sup> Nehru, Press Statement made in Brussels, 9 February 1927, *SWJN*, vol.2, 270.

<sup>41</sup> Mohandas Gandhi, “Notes on Nationalism and Internationalism,” published in *Young India*, June 18, 1925, repr. in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Electronic Book), (New Delhi: Publications Division of the Government of India, 1999), vol. 32, 12.

follow. Nehru's nationalism and internationalism sought concrete partnerships and a dynamic relationship of exchange between anti-imperialist forces worldwide. He thought India had much to contribute to the anti-imperial struggle – indeed was essential to it – but the INC also had much to learn from its anti-imperialist counterparts abroad. His position is clearly articulated in a letter to Gandhi about his experiences with the Brussels Congress and League against Imperialism: “I welcome all legitimate methods of getting into touch with other countries and peoples so that we may be able to understand their viewpoint and world politics generally. I do not think it desirable nor indeed is it possible for India to plough a lonely furrow now or in the future. It is solely with a view to self-education and self-improvement that I desire external contacts.” Nehru goes on to critique Gandhi's and the INC's vision for India's relationship with the world: “I am afraid we are terribly narrow in our outlook and the sooner we get rid of this narrowness the better. Our salvation can of course come only from the internal strength that we may evolve but one of the methods of evolving such strength should be the study of other people and their ideas.”<sup>42</sup> Nehru envisioned an Indian nationalism that dynamically interacted with a world of anti-imperialism through dialogue, exchange, and connection. He believed that only through collective action at the local, national, international, and transnational levels would India and the world be freed of imperial chains.

#### 2.4 Nehru's Global Geography of Anti-Imperialism

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<sup>42</sup> Nehru to Gandhi, 22 April 1927, *SWJN*, vol.2, 326.

If Brussels was the testing ground for Nehru to consider Indian nationalism in an international anti-imperialist framework, then we must also consider the specific encounters and connections that Nehru forged in 1927. What were the spatial contours of the international world of anti-imperialism at Brussels? Whom did Nehru see as viable partners against imperialism and why? To address these questions, this section takes the Brussels Congress as an entry point for a set of overlapping anti-imperial connections forged by Nehru, acting on behalf of the INC, during the late colonial and interwar period. At Brussels Nehru began constructing and in some cases strengthening important networks to other colonies, nations and international organizations of the 1920s. As we will see in later chapters, these connections flourished in the years leading up to independence and proved formative to India's postcolonial foreign relations. In Brussels Nehru developed an expanded geography of anti-imperial resistance that extended beyond the borders of India and even of the British Empire.

Before his trip to Europe and especially the Brussels Congress, Nehru's political activities were limited to the local, provincial and national landscapes. With his Brussels encounters, however, Nehru's vision and politics extended beyond the local and national frames to integrate a broader map of anti-imperial resistance. Nehru joined with anti-imperialist forces at Brussels and worked in creative ways to link such distant places to India. His encounters produced not only a new working knowledge of imperialism in other regions of the world once thought to be distant, but also an arsenal of contacts and partners that Nehru could draw upon for moral, intellectual, and sometimes financial

support. Brussels also strengthened Nehru's existing links to the Indian diaspora in Berlin and the British left.

*INDIANS IN BERLIN, INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM AND SOVIET RUSSIA*

By the time he arrived in Brussels, Nehru had become acquainted with many of the Indian expatriates in Europe in the 1920s. His experiences at the Congress crystallized his burgeoning ties to these communities. Nehru admitted later in his autobiography, "I was not greatly impressed by most of the Indian political exiles that I met abroad, although I admired their sacrifice, and sympathized with their sufferings and present difficulties." Towards the expatriates in Berlin, Nehru was more sympathetic: "They were, apparently, citizens of no state. They had no proper passports. Travel outside Germany was hardly possible, even residence in Germany was full of difficulties and was at the mercy of local police. It was a life of insecurity and hardship, and day-to-day worry; of continual anxiety to find the wherewithal to eat and live."<sup>43</sup> Only two expatriates impressed Nehru, and one of them was Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, a co-organizer of Brussels. The other was M.N. Roy. Roy did not attend because he thought it was a serious mistake for communists to collaborate with bourgeois nationalists.<sup>44</sup> Although Chatto had been instrumental in planning the Brussels Congress, he stayed

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<sup>43</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 161.

<sup>44</sup> For the biographical history of M.N. Roy, see Kris Manjappa, *M. N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (Delhi: Routledge, 2010).

away from the limelight at the proceedings and left Nehru to be the face and voice of India. But by the end of 1927, Chatto would emerge as a vital member of the League against Imperialism and the chief secretary of the Berlin office. In Chatto, Nehru found not only a collaborator but also a friend.

Chatto became Nehru's main contact to the anti-imperial community formed at the Brussels Congress. In particular, Chatto had contacts and knowledge of the communist movement in both Germany and Soviet Russia, and Nehru relied on his colleague in Berlin to keep in touch with international communism. In 1927, it was not clear whether Chatto was a committed communist or whether his links to Muenzenberg and the Comintern were of a pragmatic nature. Only one biography of Chatto exists, and the author, Nirode K. Barooah, casts him as an Indian revolutionary first, who saw communism as a means to connect the colonial question to broader movements of the interwar world. Nehru agreed with this assessment: "Chatto was not, I believe, a regular Communist, but he was communistically inclined."<sup>45</sup> At the same time, the Comintern greatly distrusted Indian exiles in general. A letter from Moscow to Muenzenberg warned: "It is necessary to act very carefully in establishing relations with emigrant groups in Europe."<sup>46</sup> Another letter dated several months later, named Chatto specifically as one to watch.<sup>47</sup> Chatto, however, would eventually become deeply entrenched in

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<sup>45</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 162.

<sup>46</sup> ECCI to Muenzenberg, 29 May 1926, 542/1/3/10-11, CI Papers.

<sup>47</sup> ECCI to Muenzenberg, 2 July 1926, 542/1/3/15-17, CI Papers.

international communism and move closer to the Soviet political agenda in the years to come.

It is in Brussels that Nehru imagined Soviet Russia as a bastion of anti-imperialism. Only superficially familiar with communist doctrine, Nehru's early reports from Brussels do not engage with the ideas of communism, although some of his statements increasingly demonstrate an admiration for Soviet Russia. Nehru admitted, "I have not met any Russians myself, apart from some émigrés and exiles, but the knowledge I have gathered from indirect sources about their activities and their intimate knowledge of external politics amazed me." To illustrate, Nehru mused that, "the British politician whose job it is to know thoroughly the countries he rules probably knows far less about them than the Russian experts."<sup>48</sup> Nehru appreciated not only the worldly expertise of Russians, but also their ability to circulate widely and efficiently propaganda campaigns to mobilize communists across the globe. But Nehru also commented on the dangers of the Soviets using the League against Imperialism as a tool of expansion. "Personally I have the strongest objection to being led by the nose by the Russians or anyone else. But I do not think there is much danger of this so far as we are concerned."<sup>49</sup> These encounters with ideas at Brussels sparked Nehru's interest in communism, but as we will see in the next chapter, it was his trip to Moscow later in November 1927 that nearly converted him to the doctrine.

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<sup>48</sup> Nehru, "Report on the Brussels Congress", *SWJN*, vol.2, p. 289.

<sup>49</sup> Nehru, "Report on the Brussels Congress", *SWJN*, vol.2, p. 289.



The fact that Nehru had not encountered Russians in Brussels is noteworthy. Few communists spoke at the official sessions of the Congress, and those that did were not Soviets from Russia but rather members of the Comintern from Europe, the United States, and Japan. Nevertheless, Nehru encountered Comintern informants and agents outside the meeting halls and in the private spaces of the hotel lobby, dining establishments, and smaller functions arranged outside the formal sessions. These backchannels and more personalized encounters were the preferred contact zones for communists. As early as July 1926, the Comintern wrote to Muenzenberg in Berlin on this issue: “While influencing and directing the entire work of the League, the Communist Faction should try to remain as much as possible in the background, so that neither the League nor the Congress is too obviously identified with the Communists.”<sup>50</sup>

Communists operated in the shadows of the Brussels Congress. According to one Comintern informant at Brussels, Sen Katayama, a “Small Bureau [of communists] met constantly and secretly, I support none [sic] knew the existence of such a Bureau that has been directing the Congress and everything that might come up on the Congress was discussed and decided at the Small Bureau beforehand and carried out later by the Presidium or by a commission.”<sup>51</sup> Katayama’s report is particularly revealing of the hand the Comintern had in these backchannel encounters: “We [the communist agents] think that we have carried out the instructions [from the Comintern] fully and satisfactorily.

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<sup>50</sup> ECCI to Muenzenberg, 2 July 1926, 542/1/ 3/16, CI Papers.

<sup>51</sup> Confidential report from Sen Katayama to Comrade Petrof (ECCI, Moscow), 24 February 1927, 542/1/7/131, CI Papers.

We have arranged to approach all the delegates. . . . I met the Chinese, Korean, and Indian delegates separately either attending their own delegate meeting or inviting to a dinner and introducing other delegates.”<sup>52</sup> Katayama was also responsible for urging Nehru to host a smaller meeting of Asian delegates, a point we will return to later. To be sure, Nehru and others at Brussels were keenly aware of the purposeful aloofness of communists and the absence of delegates from Soviet Russia. He wrote to the INC that he suspected the Berlin organizers were in touch with Soviet Russia, and he speculated that the Russians distanced themselves from the event “because they thought that too close an association might frighten away many people.”<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, Nehru was unquestionably intrigued by communists, communism, and ‘communistically-inclined’ expatriates, and his interest would strengthen over the next few years.

#### *EUROPEAN INTERNATIONALISM: THE CASE OF BRITISH LABOR*

Nehru had been most impressed by the socialists in Brussels. Until 1927, his time in Britain as a student from 1905 to 1912 had offered Nehru ample time to engage with theories, ideas, and intellectuals of socialist persuasion, but he admittedly had little interest in the prewar left.<sup>54</sup> A few months before the Brussels Congress, Nehru observed the 1926 general miners’ strike in England, but his letters to India on the strike offered

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<sup>52</sup> Report by Katayama, 24 February 1927, CI Papers.

<sup>53</sup> Nehru, “Report on the Brussels Congress,” *SWJN*, vol. 2, 282.

<sup>54</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 172.

little commentary on working class issues in the metropole or their implications for Indian workers. When he wrote to India in October to discuss the lessons of the strike, Nehru was most concerned with the methodology of strikes as a means to challenge the British state rather than the demands of the working class or the trade unionist critique of British capitalism and imperialism.<sup>55</sup> But in the context of the Brussels Congress in February 1927, Nehru gained a greater appreciation for those who championed the working class.

Of the socialists and trade unionists in attendance, Nehru was most attentive to the British delegation, especially Labour Party MP George Lansbury's speech on the "special blend" of nationalism and internationalism. Nehru earmarked Lansbury's speech for publication in the Indian press. Other speeches "vary in merit greatly," he explained, but "Lansbury's is certainly worth reproducing."<sup>56</sup> Lansbury effectively captured the broad vision of the Brussels Congress and League against Imperialism. He had been selected as the chairman of the entire Congress, too. His speech at Brussels began by situating the 1927 Brussels moment in a greater world history of struggle: "We are here with one spirit, one aim, one idea- the great idea that humanity has been struggling for all through the centuries - how to make the common people happy, how to lift up those who are down trodden. Friends, we freed many people from the bonds of chattel-slavery. We have

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<sup>55</sup> Nehru to Hindustani Seva Dal, October 1926, *SWJN*, Vol. 2, 247-249.

<sup>56</sup> Nehru to Rangaswami Iyengar, 16 March 1927, *SWJN*, vol. 2, 312-313.

now got to free them all from the bonds of economic servitude.”<sup>57</sup> Lansbury reminded his audience of the transnational nature of imperialism and capitalism: “The capitalist has no country...the capitalist practices this for his own ends, his own ends being to use Chinese against the Japanese, the Japanese against the Indian, the Indian against the European, always with the purpose of making money.”<sup>58</sup> He went on to argue the necessity of an *international* response to capitalism and imperialism rather than an isolated *nationalist* challenge by warning his comrades from Asia and Africa, “do not be fooled by the cry of mere nationalism...do not waste your efforts on mere nationalism...Get your national ownership, get your national control, that is right and proper, but do not stop there because if you do you will have only gone half way.”<sup>59</sup> According to Lansbury, “nationalism is to be blended with internationalism, because until it is, until the world is built on the foundation of international comradeship among the workers, again I say- all our [Brussels delegation] labour is in vain.”<sup>60</sup> For Lansbury, anti-colonial nationalism and internationalism were intimately connected and mutually interdependent. Nehru enthusiastically concurred.

The Brussels Congress’ coalescing of international socialism and national objectives produced neither a wholesale conversion of nationalists to socialism and

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<sup>57</sup> Speech given by George Lansbury at the Brussels Congress, 13 February 1927, File G29-1927, AICC Papers.

<sup>58</sup> Lansbury, Speech, AICC Papers.

<sup>59</sup> Lansbury, Speech, AICC Papers.

<sup>60</sup> Lansbury, Speech, AICC Papers.

communism, nor did it entirely dispel mistrust amongst the international proletariat leaders of their bourgeois bedfellows. However, it opened a unique opportunity for dialogue across politically divisive borders that separated socialists, communists, and nationalists. To an extent, many of the nationalists bought into the international scheme as long as nationalism was the foremost goal and internationalism was a long-term aspiration. Mahomed Hafiz Ramadan Bey, chairman of the Egyptian Nationalist Party, explained the “nationalism of the Egyptian people does not direct itself against other people, against foreign races. On the contrary, the Egyptian people wish to work hand in hand with these other races. We are only nationalists against imperialism.”<sup>61</sup> Still, many trade unionists and labor delegates from the oppressed countries remained skeptical. After hearing Lansbury’s speech on the special blend of nationalism and internationalism, Chen Kuan, representing Chinese trade unions, argued that workers in China had been faithful to international proletariat solidarity. Nevertheless, “[W]e do not see the same spirit amongst the leading labour organizations of the West.”<sup>62</sup> In fact, Kuan wrote to the Amsterdam International for help in launching the Shanghai general strike in 1925, but never received a response from leading European labor representatives. Kuan disparagingly called his European comrades “disorganizers in the ranks of the proletariat.”<sup>63</sup> The mistrust between members would come to play an important part in

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<sup>61</sup> Mahomed Hafiz Ramadan Bey speech at Brussels Congress, reprinted in “The Brussels Congress against Imperialism and for National Independence,” published by the League against Imperialism, Box 8, Folder 2, Baldwin Papers.

<sup>62</sup> Chen Kuan, Speech at Brussels Congress, File G29-1927, AICC Papers.

<sup>63</sup> Chen, Speech, AICC Papers.

inhibiting the development of the League against Imperialism, but in Brussels, the concentration and enthusiasm centered on the means of connection and not division.

In Brussels and increasingly after, Nehru embraced the links between the international proletariat movements and the Indian national campaign. In his Brussels speeches, he articulated a more concrete connection between the local conditions in India and the larger, international struggle against class exploitation that his newly found comrades were eager to stress. Nehru attributed the divisions within Indian society and the catastrophic poverty to the means by which the British capitalists ruled India by propping up exploitative princes, landowners, and Indian capitalists. The “real injury that the British have done to India” according to Nehru “is the systematic way in which they have crushed the workers and peasants of India, and made India what she is today.”<sup>64</sup> The comparison between his earlier disinterest in working class issues in 1926 and his Brussels commentary is striking and suggests a transformative moment for Nehru whose vision for India would incorporate, at least in rhetoric, a class element resembling the ideas of the international proletariat movement. It is in his Brussels report that Nehru first admitted, “Personally... I accept in its fundamentals the socialist theory of the State.”<sup>65</sup> However, he also recognized that the INC would not go as far as to commit to a class-based program. In 1927, Nehru settled for a plan for Indian independence closely

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<sup>64</sup> Nehru, Speech at Brussels, *SWJN*, Vol. 2, 273.

<sup>65</sup> Nehru, Brussels Congress Report, *SWJN*, vol.2, 287.

connected to the international anti-imperialism. Socialist reform for India would come only after independence.

*INTERCOLONIAL CONNECTIONS: CHINA, INDONESIA, AND EGYPT*

Perhaps the most important connections for Nehru were his intercolonial ties that emerged from his encounters in Brussels. Of course, a shared historical experience of anti-colonial struggle had been the key linkage between India and other colonies in Asia and Africa. But Nehru also reminded his Brussels comrades that the most embarrassing issue of the day for him had been Britain's use of Indian soldiers to intervene on behalf of imperial interests in China, Egypt, Abyssinia, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Syria, Georgia, Tibet, Afghanistan, Burma and elsewhere. Nehru came to resent deeply that Indian manpower had become the face of the British Empire, while encounters with Indians in these localities produced a view of India as a junior partner- indeed the iron fist - of imperialism.<sup>66</sup>

China came to occupy a critical place in the Brussels Congress, but also in Nehru's expanding geography of anti-imperial resistance. The Chinese presence far outnumbered that of any other delegation, and the Kuomintang Party (KMT) executive, the Canton Government, and Chinese trade unions all contributed handsomely to the

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<sup>66</sup> For an argument about India as junior partner of empire see Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

Brussels Congress budget.<sup>67</sup> But China was central to the Congress because the pressing situation on the ground during 1927 weighed heavy in the minds of those in Brussels. A civil war and imperialist intervention seemed an imminent danger, and during the same month as the Brussels Congress, the British parliament in London began deliberating over the best means to intervene in China to quell unrest amongst workers, warlords, and nationalists. Moreover, Chinese nationalists, trade unionists, and Soviet-trained communists were still working under a fragile alliance in February 1927, and the Brussels Congress delegates envisioned the alliance of workers and nationalists in China as a model for progressive revolution.<sup>68</sup> Nehru commented on this in his opening address to the delegation, “The noble example of the Chinese nationalists has filled us with hope, and we [Indian nationalists] earnestly want as soon as we can to be able to emulate them and follow in their footsteps.”<sup>69</sup> The concentration on China would be a significant miscalculation for the Brussels Congress and the later League- not to mention the Soviets and Stalin- whose hopes for a nationalist and communist allied revolution would be dashed only a few months later in April 1927 when the KMT general, Chiang Kai-shek,

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<sup>67</sup> Even Nehru knew the Brussels Congress was funded mainly by China and Mexico. See Nehru, Brussels Congress Report, *SWJN*, vol.2, 278-296.

<sup>68</sup> The main nationalist party in China, the Kuomintang Party (KMT), had worked with Chinese communists in the CCP and the Comintern since 1923 when KMT founder, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, forged the alliance. The Comintern recognized the KMT to be the foremost revolutionary force capable of uniting the Chinese, and Moscow directed the CCP to embed itself within the KMT. See Michael Weiner, “Comintern in East Asia, 1919-1939,” in *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* by Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 158-190.

<sup>69</sup> Nehru, Speech made at the Brussels Congress, 10 February 1927, *SWJN*, vol.2, 276.



turned on the Chinese communists.<sup>70</sup> But in February 1927 Nehru and the rest of the delegates considered China the center of the world struggle against imperialism and capitalism.

Nehru's fascination with the historical and contemporary connections between India and China can be traced back to the Brussels moment. Nehru considered solidarity between India and China indispensable to the anti-imperial campaign in 1927, and he proposed a concrete agenda to cultivate linkages between the two countries menaced by the British Empire. Nehru personally drafted the Indian and Chinese resolution "with the object of attaining the complete independence of India and China by carrying on a joint struggle against British imperialism."<sup>71</sup> It is interesting that when the Comintern typed and circulated Nehru's resolution, the words "joint struggle" were changed to "Soviet struggle." It is not clear who retyped this, but the Communist International Executive produced the document. Perhaps this maneuver was a distinction important for communists in China who were divided between Soviet-backed groups in the cities and Maoists in the countryside. The document's Indian signatory, namely Nehru, agreed to "do his best to persuade the Indian National Congress to organize an energetic campaign by means of the press and public meetings in all parts of India, against the dispatch of Indian troops to China and the recall of the troops already sent; and in support of the

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<sup>70</sup> The relationship between Chiang and Moscow is complex. When Chiang launched the Northern Expedition and arrived in Shanghai, Stalin and the Comintern urged communists to lay down their arms and work with the KMT. Even after the bloodbath in which Chiang massacred communists and trade unionists in Shanghai, Moscow held onto the united front and alliance with Chiang until the end of 1927. See Michael Weiner, "Comintern in East Asia."

<sup>71</sup> Nehru, Resolution on India and China, undated, 542/1/10/4, CI Papers.

Chinese struggle for freedom.”<sup>72</sup> Nehru also undertook the responsibility of communicating these directives to the Indian trade unions, a formidable task since Nehru at the time lacked contact and connection to the labor movement in India. In the resolution, Nehru also charged Chinese signatories with the duty of propagating “to China and the rest of the world the cause of Indian liberation from the British yoke and at every critical set of the Indian movement for freedom to support the same by all means including boycott, strikes, etc.”<sup>73</sup> Nehru’s other resolutions deal with the exchange of representatives between India and China, and the desirability of a forthcoming joint conference between the two delegations.

Nehru went to work immediately on persuading the INC to commit to solidarity with their Chinese comrades. His report on Brussels dedicated an impressive number of pages to the Chinese situation vis-à-vis Britain and India, and also to the necessary steps to build stronger connections with China. In particular, Nehru recommended a Chinese information bureau, headed by a representative from China, to be established in Calcutta to collect and disseminate news from the east. The INC and KMT, as well as the Indian federation of trade unions - All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) - and the Chinese trade unions, should send representatives to their counterparts’ annual meetings. Nehru also thought it desirable to send Indian students to China to study and further develop contacts between the two countries. Nehru recognized in these plans the problem of passports and travel restrictions imposed by the colonial state, especially for Indians to

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<sup>72</sup> Nehru, Resolution on India and China, CI Papers.

<sup>73</sup> Nehru, Resolution on India and China, CI Papers.

travel to China, but “even if Government prevented our representatives from leaving India it would have a good effect.”<sup>74</sup>

Nehru considered the links between India and China to be of the utmost importance, but often the Chinese delegates irritated him. Through the formal sessions, as well as a private meetings arranged by Nehru with the Chinese delegates, Nehru sensed an impatience among his comrades. To the INC, Nehru wrote of the Chinese: “[F]aced as they were with a critical situation, they naturally wanted immediate action and were intolerant of delay.”<sup>75</sup> Nehru noted that others in Brussels “were rather tired of listening to Chinese orations, which were not remarkable for their lucidity.”<sup>76</sup> But Nehru sympathized with their urgency and purpose, explaining to the INC that the Chinese representatives “were natural products of a revolution and I was led regretfully to wish that we in India might also develop some of this energy and driving force, at the expense if need be of some of our intellectuality.”<sup>77</sup> Nehru’s rather unimpressed appraisal of the Chinese, however, would radically change when he met Madame Sun Yat-Sen, widow of the late hero of Chinese nationalism, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, later that year.

In Brussels, Nehru gained a better knowledge of resistance against imperialism beyond the British empire-state. In particular, he learned more about Dutch imperialism in Java. He also developed a connection with his fellow executive council member,

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<sup>74</sup> Nehru, Report on Brussels Congress, *SWJN*, vol. 2, 295.

<sup>75</sup> Nehru, Report on Brussels Congress, 294.

<sup>76</sup> Nehru, Report on Brussels Congress, 280.

<sup>77</sup> Nehru, Report on Brussels Congress, 280.

Mohammed Hatta, whom he met for the first time. Educated in the Netherlands, Hatta stayed on in Holland in the 1920s to develop a nationalist movement, Perhimpunan Indonesia (PI). In 1927 Hatta was the chairman of PI and the editor of *Indonesia Merdeka* (Free Indonesia). Hatta later recalled his encounter with Nehru as an opportunity to “establish a cordial friendship.”<sup>78</sup> After 1927 Nehru and Hatta had little personal contact, mainly because Hatta had been incarcerated shortly after the advent of the League against Imperialism and spent much of the 1930s in prison or exiled for his leadership in the nationalist resistance to Dutch rule. But the moment of encounter left Hatta with rich memories of Nehru. The Indonesian leader who later became the first Vice President (1945-1956) under Sukarno recalled: “Though Nehru and I had very few personal contacts, we had in our feeling a close and affectionate relationship over the years.”<sup>79</sup> Nehru, too, came to appreciate the Indonesian situation and to envision a shared history of resistance for India and Indonesia, one that would later inform his close postcolonial relations with Sukarno’s Indonesia.

Egypt also came to inhabit a special place in Nehru’s anti-imperial geography. At the time, Egypt was nominally an independent state with a constitutional monarchy. Through a series of treaties, however, the British still maintained four reservations: the right to control Egyptian foreign relations; to station military at the Suez Canal; to protect with force British citizens and subjects remaining in Egypt; and to maintain control over

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<sup>78</sup> Mohammed Hatta, interviewed by B.R. Nanda, September 1972, interview transcript 121, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) Oral History Collection, NMML, New Delhi, India.

<sup>79</sup> Hatta, Oral History, Transcript 121.

the Sudan. Essentially, these reservations required a foreign military presence and the British flexed their muscle whenever the Egyptian king or parliament acted without imperial consent. Hafiz Ramadan Bey was the main delegate from Egypt at the Brussels Congress. He served as a Member of the Egyptian parliament and represented the Egyptian Nationalist Party (Watanist Party). The Watanist Party was founded in 1907 by Mustafa Kamil, a spokesman for an anti-colonial nationalism that stood for an ‘Egypt for Egyptians.’ In retrospect, historians have characterized Kamil’s position as an early articulation of Pan-Islamic sentiment.<sup>80</sup> Although Kamil died a few months after the foundation of the party, his successor Pasha Mohammed Farid led a formidable challenge to the British in the days leading up to the First World War. But Farid lived in exile most of the war and died in 1919. Hafiz Ramadan emerged as the successor to Kamil and Farid, but the Watanist Party never regained authority and traction in postwar Egypt mainly because Zaghlul’s Wafd Party emerged as a more powerful alternative in 1919. Nevertheless, Hafiz Ramadan had connections to Egyptian politics and a strong electoral following in the 1920s. The Wafd Party did not send a delegate, but officially joined the League against Imperialism after the Brussels Congress.

Hafiz Ramadan came to Brussels to remind his comrades that Egypt, while nominally independent, still suffered under British imperialism. “Despite this pseudo-independence, Great Britain has still its iron heel in the shape of its military forces, pressed on the neck of Egypt and does not intend to sacrifice the least of the interest of

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<sup>80</sup> For a history of Egypt in this period, see Selma Botman, *Egypt from Independence to Revolution, 1919-1952* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1991).

British imperialism in favour of the vital interest of the Egyptian people.”<sup>81</sup> It is not hard to imagine that Nehru envisioned a similar outcome if Dominion Status were to be introduced in India. Ramadan and the Egyptian situation embodied everything that was wrong with self-rule within an empire-state, and the necessity to seek nationhood within an international community instead. Nehru also considered the problems of Egypt in particular to be a product of the British imperial interests in controlling the routes between the metropole and India. Nehru’s first statement at Brussels underscores this point: “Both Egypt and other parts of Africa have suffered domination because British imperialism wanted to strengthen its hold on India and to protect its sea routes to that country.”<sup>82</sup>

Aside from Egypt, African colonies or Pan-African activists hardly figured in Nehru’s reports and writings on the Brussels Congress. With notable exception of Mexico, the Brussels Congress largely focused on Asia – and specifically China and India – but a sizeable number of African delegates came to Brussels from South Africa, Sierra Leon, Senegal, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunis. There was a concerted effort among these delegates to meet separately with their African-American counterparts from the United States representing the National Association for the Advancement of Colored

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<sup>81</sup> Pamphlet, “The Brussels Congress” League against Imperialism Secretariat, Berlin. Box 8, Folder 2, Baldwin Papers.

<sup>82</sup> Nehru, Statement to the Press at Brussels, SWJN, vol. 2, 271.

People (NAACP) and the American Negro Labor Congress.<sup>83</sup> Nehru was sympathetic to the struggles of the African and African-American delegations in his report to the INC: “There were able men among them, full of eloquence and energy, but they all bore traces of the long martyrdom which their race had suffered, more perhaps than any other people, and there was a want of hope in the dark future which faces them.”<sup>84</sup> In a later report on the activities of the League against Imperialism, Nehru recognized the organization as a vessel to strengthen Pan-African alignments. The League against Imperialism brought together “the negroes in the U.S.A. and those in Africa” to “make them act together.”<sup>85</sup> Outside of these brief mentions, however, Nehru did not attend to the issues in Africa or Pan-African politics, but instead his anti-imperial geography concentrated on the nodal points of China, Indonesia, and Egypt.

Perhaps most intriguing, Nehru folded Egypt into his burgeoning conception of a federation of Asiatic countries. Earlier in the chapter, I pointed to the Comintern’s insistence that Nehru host a smaller gathering of Asiatic delegates. While the Comintern intentions were to link Asian delegates to communism, for Nehru, the meetings offered the opportunity to develop intercolonial connections. But this Asiatic community extended beyond what we commonly consider Asia to include Egypt. Because Egypt was the gateway to South Asia for the British, it had to be an essential partner in the making

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<sup>83</sup> Negro and African delegates passed a resolution for greater cooperation among Pan-Africanists and created a separate commission to examine the “Negro question.” See, “The Brussels Congress,” Box 8, Folder 2, Baldwin Papers, 21-22.

<sup>84</sup> Nehru, Report on the Brussels Congress, 19 February 1929, *SWJN*, vol. 2, 280.

<sup>85</sup> Nehru, Report to the Working Committee, 7 March 1927. *SWJN*, vol. 2, 300.

of an intercolonial community. When Nehru wrote to the INC about a federation of Asiatic elements with a “common bond,” he included Egypt because it “might be considered an Asiatic country for this purpose.”<sup>86</sup> It seems from this maneuver, as well as his later writings on Egypt and world history, that Nehru considered Egypt to be oriented even more toward the Indian Ocean world than toward the African world. For Nehru, Egypt’s Suez Canal was the gateway to the Indian Ocean and India. That he integrated Egypt into his early schemes at Brussels for a pan-Asian vision also points to the centrality of anti-imperialism, rather than regional affinities, linking India to the colonized world. It was a shared and interconnected experience of imperialism, as well as a much-needed cross-border collaboration of anti-colonial resistance, that informed Nehru’s intercolonial connections in the 1920s and 1930s.

But even in 1927, the international spaces and institutional networks of the League against Imperialism seemed the only possible means to foster these intercolonial connections against empire. In his reflections, Nehru considered the intercolonial discussions of an Asiatic federation “premature” given that “various parts of Asia are more inaccessible to each other than they are to Europe and at present moment Europe is the best meeting ground for Asiatic nationalities.”<sup>87</sup> Rather, it was the international meeting spaces in Europe like the Brussels Congress and League against Imperialism, that promised a more coordinated intercolonial coalition. The best course of action was to work through the League, but also exchange contact details, publications, reports, and

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<sup>86</sup> Nehru, Report on the Brussels Congress, 19 February 1927, *SWJN*, vol. 2, 290.

<sup>87</sup> Nehru, Report on the Brussels Congress, 290.



propaganda as much as possible. And “whenever possible we should try to visit the other countries and put ourselves in touch with the national organizations there.”<sup>88</sup> In the 1920s, then, Nehru depended on the League against Imperialism as a primary vehicle to connect to other geographic sites of resistance against empires.

### *THE AMERICAS AND THE AMERICANS*

Alongside India and China, Mexico served as the third site highlighted at the Brussels Congress. It is noteworthy that Mexico in 1927 was an independent state, and the delegation contributed handsomely to the Brussels Congress organizers. Jose Vasconcelos - Mexican writer, politician and presidential candidate in 1929- positioned Mexico as the natural leader of a Pan-American resistance to the invisible hand of United States imperialism. He argued that local capitalists suppressed the masses in Latin America, while U.S. imperialists pillaged their Southern neighbors “through robbery, through bravery, through cruelty and through cleverness.”<sup>89</sup> Nehru listened to other speeches of delegates from Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Peru, Venezuela and Colombia who characterized the “American Dollar Empire as the common problem of us all, because it is an empire, which takes tribute from the whole world.”<sup>90</sup> Reporting to the INC on Brussels in 1927, Nehru was profoundly interested in his American counterparts.

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<sup>88</sup> Nehru, Report on the Brussels Congress, 290.

<sup>89</sup> Vasconcelas Speech at Brussels Congress, League against Imperialism Archives (1927-1931), File 39, IISH Papers.

<sup>90</sup> Manuel Gomez Speech at Brussels Congress, File G29-1927, AICC Papers.

He raised this issue with colleagues in India: “Most of us, specially [sic] from Asia, were wholly ignorant of the problems of South America, and of how the rising imperialism of the United States, with its tremendous resources and its immunity from outside attack, is gradually taking a strangle hold to Central and South America.”<sup>91</sup>

But Nehru most admired the U.S. delegate Roger Nash Baldwin (1884-1981). Baldwin came from New York and attended the Brussels Congress as a representative of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), an organization he founded in 1920 to protect the legal rights of United States’ citizens under the national constitution. Under his leadership, the ACLU provided legal counsel to defendants in some of the most high profile court cases in the United States including the Scopes Trial (1925) over the right to teach evolution in schools. After World War II, Baldwin became an important international champion of human rights, and he was called upon to assist in the postwar establishment of Civil Liberties unions in Japan, Germany and Austria.<sup>92</sup> Baldwin had other international interests and he chaired the International Committee for Political Prisoners, an international affiliate of the ACLU. His keen interest in India’s independence movement began during World War I when he was imprisoned as a conscientious objector. He met Indian political exiles while serving his yearlong term.

The Indians in prison during the Great War were accused of circulating seditious

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<sup>91</sup> Nehru, Report on the Brussels Congress, *SWJN*, vol.2, 281. This also became a prominent theme in *Glimpses of World History: Being Further Letters To His Daughter Written In Prison, And Containing a Rambling Account of History For Young People*, (The John Day Company: New York, 1942).

<sup>92</sup> Robert C. Cottrell, *Roger Nash Baldwin and the American Civil Liberties Union* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2000).

literature about wartime allies like the British. From 1920 onwards, after his release, Baldwin worked with Indian independence organizations in New York, and his later encounter with Nehru at the Brussels Congress in 1927 strengthened his commitment to India's independence struggle.

Through the course of the meetings at Brussels, Nehru and Baldwin began cultivating a professional partnership that would have lasting consequences for both. When Nehru considered his time at Brussels, Baldwin stood out as his “Anglo-American” colleague with “a certain similarity in our outlook.”<sup>93</sup> Beyond the general concern of anti-imperialism, the two delegates considered the issue of political prisoners in India and what Baldwin and the ACLU might do to help. Baldwin had already sought to contribute financially to a fund for Indian political prisoners, but he had yet to find the proper channel to do so. From Brussels on February 11, 1927, Nehru wrote a letter to the INC general secretary to introduce Baldwin as “one of the most courageous and effective workers in the United States.” Nehru asked that the INC to facilitate a process in which Baldwin and the ACLU could contribute funds to protect the civil liberties of political prisoners in India. He added in conclusion, “I have no doubt that you and the Congress will cordially welcome American help, not merely because of its monetary value but specially [sic] because it is an expression of the goodwill of friends in America.”<sup>94</sup>

Nehru's relationship with Baldwin over time offers interesting clues to the Indian leader's ambivalence toward the United States that would later characterize his

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<sup>93</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 172.

<sup>94</sup> Nehru to Rangaswami Iyengar, 11 February 1927, *SWJN*, vol. 2, 277.

postcolonial policies.<sup>95</sup> In Baldwin, Nehru found a like-minded reformer and colleague who could be a worthy ally in the United States. To Nehru, the American left could be trusted. However, Baldwin and the League experience also informed Nehru of the dangers of the imperial tendencies of the U.S. government and capitalists. The United States national government could *not* be trusted. These conflicting images of the United States likely left on Nehru ambiguous perceptions of the country. As we will see, during the decades after Brussels, Baldwin and Nehru developed a close professional and personal relationship, exchanging ideas, information and impressions of the changing world around them.<sup>96</sup>

## 2.5 Conclusion

We see from Brussels a widening of Nehru's conceptual geography of anti-imperial resistance, as well as an expanding address book of new contacts and partners against empires. At the Brussels Congress and through the League against Imperialism, Nehru came to be integrated into a community- both imaginative but also through personal encounters - of anti-imperialism. The Brussels Congress opened up new international spaces from which to contest empire, and the League against Imperialism came to be emblematic of the possibilities and futures available in the late 1920s. Nehru's experiences enabled him to consider the struggle in India as interconnected with other

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<sup>95</sup> Kenton Clymer makes this crucial point. See his "Jawaharlal Nehru and the United States: The Preindependence Years," *Diplomatic History* 14, 2 (April 1990): 143-161.

<sup>96</sup> Roger Baldwin, "Reflections of Jawaharlal Nehru," undated 1967, Box 7, Folder 30, Baldwin Papers.

movements across the globe against oppression of nation, class, and race. Nehru's geography of anti-imperialist resistance came to include places as diverse and distant as China, Indonesia, Egypt, Mexico, the United States, and Soviet Russia. It included connections to Indian diasporas and metropolitan partners on the British left. This was a critical anti-imperialist geography that Nehru could tap into throughout the ebbs and flows of the Indian nationalist movement.

The remaining pages of this dissertation examine and assess how and when Nehru drew upon and deployed this expanded geography of anti-imperialism in his struggles within and beyond the arena of nationalist politics. As Nehru came to envision Indian nationalism in relation to international anti-imperialism, he began to make more radical claims against the colonial state. On a personal level, Nehru argued that he had a right to join the international anti-imperial community of the League. And more broadly, India ought to have the freedom to act internationally and along anti-imperial lines free from the constraints of the British Empire. For a rather moderate Indian National Congress, Nehru's calls to break completely with the imperial ties were not always welcome. When he returned home to India in the late 1920s, he would emerge as a luminary of the leftwing of the Congress and those seeking independence from the empire. But before Nehru returned to India to make use of his broader understanding of Indian nationalism and his arsenal of connections across the globe, he spent several months traveling across Europe in the service of a new international institution, the League against Imperialism. The next chapter explores the role of Nehru in the making of the League.

### **CHAPTER THREE: NEHRU AND THE MAKING OF THE LEAGUE AGAINST IMPERIALISM**

1927 was a busy year for the Indian Political Intelligence (IPI) bureau, a secretive department of the British imperial administration charged with the task of tracking the movement and revolutionary activities of Indians abroad.<sup>1</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru's European travels had kept the IPI occupied, and the commencement of the Brussels Congress in February produced a flurry of reports on Nehru's indoctrination into an international anti-imperial movement. The official stance within the IPI, and in London and Delhi, was clear: "There can be no question that the League aims at upsetting the existing form of government in India, as elsewhere, its very name is in itself a sufficient indication of its object."<sup>2</sup> Because of his League connections, the IPI concluded in early 1928 that Nehru "more than any other leader... may be considered responsible for the comparatively close liaison established during the last few years between the Congress [INC] and political groups abroad."<sup>3</sup> For the British colonial intelligence community in London and Delhi, Nehru came to be considered one of the most dangerously seditious INC leaders of the late 1920s.

This chapter concentrates on Nehru's activities in Europe after the Brussels Congress in February until his departure for India in December 1927. During these

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<sup>1</sup> Report, "Visit of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru to Europe," 21 February 1928, Personal Files, Jawaharlal Nehru: Activities, February 1926-December 1935, Fiche 528, IPI Papers.

<sup>2</sup> "Refusal of a passport to Mme. Sun Yat Sen," League against Imperialism Files, Fiche 327, IPI Papers.

<sup>3</sup> Report, "Visit of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru," IPI Papers.

months, Nehru served as a key figure in the making of the League against Imperialism, a moment in his career that was tracked closely by colonial intelligence but has not been studied by scholars in any depth. Historians have studied Nehru at the Brussels Congress, but have neglected the significance of his League committee work throughout 1927 that increasingly entangled Nehru into the international struggle for the “oppressed people of the world.” Appointed to the executive council, Nehru traveled the European continent in 1927 in the service of the League against Imperialism. These months became a critical moment when Nehru imagined himself not only at home in Indian national politics, but at home in the world of anti-imperialism.

In the last chapter, we saw how the Brussels Congress served as an important site of encounter, and Nehru’s experiences in this milieu profoundly changed his vision for Indian nationalism and its role in the world. This chapter demonstrates Nehru’s contribution to the making the League against Imperialism as an institutional hub for anti-imperial activities and connections. In his efforts to spearhead the making of the League, we see Nehru not only as a member, but an instrumental leader and agent on the world stage. Historians have argued that the League was a space for European ideas and values, and that Nehru’s entanglement with the League reflected a passive appropriation of European epistemology.<sup>4</sup> This was not the case. Rather the history of Nehru’s agency in the making of the League demonstrates the ways he contributed to the construction of

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<sup>4</sup> Gopal argues that Nehru’s experience in Brussels was an encounter with “European radical tradition” and Nehru sought to appropriate and apply European doctrine to India. See his *Jawaharlal Nehru*, 58. For a key work on Nehru’s ideas as a derivative of British colonial discourse see Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). For a general critique of Indian nationalist leaders, see *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

a new international space that integrated voices and ideas within and beyond the confines of European epistemology. Nehru was essential to the history of international anti-imperialism in the late 1920s. The ideas he brought back to India at the end of 1927 were not wholesale derivatives of an abstract European epistemology informed by what he learned at Brussels. They constituted a set of ideas about India and the world that he helped create in dialogue with an international community of anti-imperialists.

This chapter then explores the dynamic processes at work in Nehru's interaction with the League against Imperialism. Nehru contributed to the building of a framework and institutional center for the League against Imperialism. He became a key partner in the anti-imperial movement. Meanwhile, Nehru also continued to learn from the League community and expand his geography of anti-imperial resistance through his committee work as well as his additional opportunities to encounter international socialists and communists in Europe and Soviet Russia. I sketch here the dynamic processes of agency and observation embedded in these important months of Nehru's work on the international terrain of anti-imperial politics in the interwar world.

### 3.1 Nehru and the Dynamics of the League against Imperialism

Few anti-colonial nationalists had the opportunity to contribute as much time and energy to developing the League against Imperialism as Nehru could in the nine months between the February Brussels Congress and his departure for India in December 1927. His wife Kamala's health improved, but the Nehru family stayed in Europe through the monsoon season to ensure that the extreme conditions of the Indian rains did not cause a



relapse. As an executive council member, Nehru was a key architect of the League's framework during the nascent stages of the institution's history. He took part in two executive council meetings in Amsterdam (March) and Cologne (August), and paid several informal visits to the provisional secretariats in Berlin and Paris to oversee the organization of the headquarters. He ensured that the INC made financial contributions to the League in the sum of 100 pounds sterling, a hefty donation in 1927. Beyond institutional contributions, Nehru convinced the INC to pay his travel expenses in connection with the League against Imperialism as well.<sup>5</sup> Nehru's, and by extension the Congress,' financial and organizational support made India a powerful partner within the anti-imperial coalition of the League during its first months of institutional uncertainty.

Within several weeks of the Brussels Congress, the executive council met in Amsterdam to hammer out a concrete plan for creating the League against Imperialism. Attendees included Edo Fimmen of the Amsterdam International Federation of Trade Unions; Willi Muenzenberg of the German Communist Party; George Lansbury and Reginald Bridgeman of the British Labour Party; Henri Barbusse of the French Communist Party; Manuel Ugarte of the Argentine nationalist movement; Mohamed Hatta of Perhimpunan Indonesia; Liau Hansin of the Executive of the KMT; Chan Kuen of the Chinese Trade Union Association; and Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union. The Executive Council (EC) had been elected at the Brussels Congress, and it was responsible for making the decisions for the structure and statutes of the

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<sup>5</sup> Nehru relied on the INC to reimburse him for expenditures related to travel, cables and postal services in connection with the League against Imperialism. See his correspondence with the INC general secretary Rangaswami Iyengar, File 127(ii) 1927, AICC Papers.

League.<sup>6</sup> The international secretaries, appointed by the EC, carried out the decisions of the council and also the League's daily functions. A larger General Council (GC) also existed mainly of delegates from the Brussels Congress who committed to the League program and agreed to meet on an annual basis. Funds were sparse in the nascent stage of the League, and the Brussels Congress expenditure nearly wiped out the treasury. Edo Fimmen and the Amsterdam International Federation of Trade Unions loaned money for the first executive meeting, and the EC members promised significant contributions to keep the League afloat in the first months.<sup>7</sup> Frequently the secretaries had to operate as fundraisers and solicit money from members on a regular basis to meet the budgetary needs of the organization.<sup>8</sup> The members from the colonies contributed "handsomely" in the first months, but the League increasingly came to rely on communist sources.<sup>9</sup> Money did not come from the Comintern directly, but through trade unions and other organizations linked to the communist party. For reasons provided in later chapters, donations from members quickly dried up in 1928, forcing the League to turn to the

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<sup>6</sup> League against Imperialism Statutes, Political Files, Serial Number 123, Jawaharlal Nehru Papers at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. (Hereafter cited as JN Papers).

<sup>7</sup> Donations came from the U.S. (Baldwin), Latin America (Ugarte), and Germany (Muenzenberg). Substantial contributions were promised from Egyptian and KMT members. See Nehru, "Note for the Working Committee," 4 April 1927, *SWJN*, vol. 2, 316-323.

<sup>8</sup> See solicitation letter from Chatto (LAI) to Baldwin (New York), 5 May 1928, Box 8, Folder 3, Baldwin Papers.

<sup>9</sup> Roger Baldwin remarked on the financial state of the League in a letter to Nehru dated December 12, 1927. It warned that while the colonial countries funded a significant portion of the budget, the financial necessities were forcing the League to seek more and more funds from communist and Russian trade unions. JN Papers, Correspondence Files, Volume 6. In a later letter to the League secretariat, Baldwin warned that the "financial position is weak in leaning so heavily to one side- namely on organizations directly or indirectly controlled by the Communist Party." Baldwin to LAI secretary, Chattopadhyaya, 19 December 1928, Box 8, Folder 3, Baldwin Papers.

Comintern and Soviet Russia. But in 1927, the EC and individual members managed to keep the League secretariat going on a meager budget.

Nehru offered substantial guidance on the main concerns discussed at the first EC meeting. First, the rules for membership to the League were to be discussed. Second, a plan for the establishment of an international secretariat was of the utmost urgency for the executive members. Nehru became one of the most valuable agents in both of these early League projects. Because the League brought together activists, revolutionaries, and intellectuals from a wide spectrum of political affiliations - some sympathetic to anti-colonial resistance but by no means active in the struggle - the institution had to be accommodative and flexible in its membership. No one on the executive council knew this better than Nehru. He thought that the Indian National Congress might welcome the League's anti-imperial message, but it would not accept the socialist and communist inspired agenda of the institution for a variety of reasons.<sup>10</sup> To confront the issue, Nehru advocated a two-tiered structure for inclusion based on whether members chose to *affiliate* or *associate* with the League. The EC preferred members to be organizations, but arrangements were made for individuals to also join.<sup>11</sup> Affiliated organizations or individuals were bound by all of the League programs and policies including both the

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<sup>10</sup> The Congress Socialist Party did not form until 1934. It functioned as the first socialist pressure group within the INC. Even then, opponents of socialism and communism within the INC far outnumbered the CSP. Some opponents argued that socialism and communism would force India to follow a foreign-based program dictated from Europe or the U.S.S.R. Others had interests in upholding the social structure in India. Gandhians advocated social reform through constructive programs and uplift of the poor and untouchables within the existing social structure in India. See "The Rise of the Left-Wing" in Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence* (New Delhi: Viking Press, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> Nehru, Note for the Working Committee of the All-India National Congress, 4 April 1927, *SWJN*, Vol. 2, 316-323.

socialist and nationalist creed, while associated members were linked to the League to a lesser extent and could profess cooperation without towing the official League line.

Nehru explained in a report to the INC: “I pressed for this rule chiefly in the interests of the Indian Congress and I feel that the Congress can take advantage of it without in any way committing itself to anything it does not approve of.”<sup>12</sup> Nehru also recognized the importance of this rule to other organizations whose primary concerns were not imperialism- the Civil Liberties movement for example might seek membership as an expression of solidarity and sympathy. The executive council agreed with Nehru, and the membership rules were approved.

Nehru also volunteered to head a special sub-committee to oversee the formation of a League secretariat. With a broadly conceived mission and spatially diverse membership, the League had to operate as a centralizing force linking local struggles to a loosely knit community of anti-imperialists. A grave responsibility fell on the secretariat to collect and translate information coming in from League members across the world, while also redistributing and recasting such vernacular pieces as part of a cohesive, global anti-imperial discourse. The power to construct the meaning of anti-imperialism often rested in the hands of those in the League center. If functioning properly, the League press service could reach some of the most influential movements of the interwar period, notably the Indian National Congress, but also Perhimpunan Indonesia (Indonesian National Independence Party), the Kuomintang Party in China, the Wafd Party in Egypt, the Egyptian Nationalist Party, the Sinn Fein Irish Republican movement, the American

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<sup>12</sup> Nehru, Note for the Working Committee, 322.

Civil Liberties Union, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples, and labor organizations like the Confederation Generale du Travail Unitaire (CGTU) in France, South African Trade Union Congress, and the All-India Trade Union Congress. Already in 1927, self-funded national sections of the League began work in distant places like Argentina, Brazil, China, Cuba, Ecuador, France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, Nicaragua, Palestine, Philippines, Puerto Rico, San Salvador, South Africa, the United States, and Uruguay.<sup>13</sup>

Nehru devoted most of his time in Europe in 1927 to creating a strong institutional center capable of linking the world of anti-imperialism. The first concern was the location of the secretariat. The provisional center was located in Berlin, but it was the executive council's intention to relocate the main office to Paris. Paris had been a center of anti-imperial activities before the Brussels Congress, and French communists, socialists, trade unionists, and revolutionaries from the colonies had worked in close alliance before 1927.<sup>14</sup> At the first executive meeting in March, however, the relocation proved impossible because French authorities cracked down on participants in the Brussels Congress including delegate Lamine Senghor, a Senegalese nationalist and brother of the more famous Léopold Sédar Senghor, later the president of postcolonial Senegal. Lamine Senghor founded the Paris-based Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre

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<sup>13</sup> For a comprehensive list of League against Imperialism members and national branches, see File 2, League Against Imperialism Archive, IISH Papers.

<sup>14</sup> A history of anti-imperial activities is given in the "Report of the Activities of the French League Against Imperialism, Colonialism and For National Independence." League against Imperialism circular to all executive council and general council members sent by LAI secretary Louis Gibarti (Paris), 20 July 1927, 542/1/21/8, CI Papers.

and its journal *La voix des nègres*.<sup>15</sup> Immediately after the Brussels Congress and the wide circulation of Senghor's speech, the French authorities imprisoned him. Harsh prison conditions coupled with lasting injuries from his service in World War I led to his premature death in November 1927 at an age of 38. The atmosphere in Paris forced the League center to remain in Berlin until other alternatives could be explored.

Nehru worked on the development of the secretariat closely with Roger Baldwin. In April the two met in Switzerland to discuss the state of the Berlin office and formulate a comprehensive plan for the secretariat. Out of his talks with Baldwin, Nehru produced a scathing twenty-two-point critique of the headquarters sent on May 3<sup>rd</sup> to both League secretaries as well as Edo Fimmen in Amsterdam and Baldwin in Paris. Baldwin remarked that Nehru's report was a "more patient and thorough job than I would have done," but "between us I think we have said all there is to say."<sup>16</sup> The critique ranged from the fine details of the reports being circulated to the larger issues of general focus and direction of League work. The letter opens by announcing that he and Baldwin agree that, "all is not well with the League and we ought to wake up to this fact and take speedy action to put matters right."<sup>17</sup> However, Nehru wrote: "I feel strongly that the League supplies a real want and it can develop into a powerful organization. . . . [Nevertheless] no number of pious resolutions, fervent appeals and exaggerated statements will do us much

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<sup>15</sup> Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Baldwin to Nehru, 7 May 1927, Box 8, Folder 2, Baldwin Papers.

<sup>17</sup> Nehru to Gibarti, 2 May 1927, Box 8, Folder 2, Baldwin Papers.

good or bring helpers and associates if the substance behind them is lacking.”<sup>18</sup> The biggest obstacle for the League had been the failure to establish a permanent site for the secretariat and hire able personnel to manage the serious responsibilities of the first international institution linking anti-imperialists. Nehru critiqued the circulars from the secretariat for their errors and translation problems, while the delays in sending updated news and reports on the executive meetings “is regrettable as showing the confusion that must exist in your office.”<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, the general direction of the League secretariat work seemed to Nehru to be misguided. The executive council focus had been on the finances and structure of the secretariat, but the secretaries spent most of their time and resources circulating pompous manifestos and planning more LAI sponsored conferences in places like China. The neglect of the secretaries to carry out the decisions of the executive council was troubling. Nehru thought it “premature” to advance another conference without building a solid nucleus of anti-imperial activity in Berlin.<sup>20</sup> Once the center began functioning properly, Nehru argued, the secretariat could then entertain possibilities for future meetings. On the issue of a conference in China for League members from Asia, Nehru urged a reconsideration given the situation on the ground. Early reports from China suggested a bloodbath was underway in Shanghai due to an attack by General Chiang Kai-shek’s military on the communists. Since the Brussels Congress, the alliance

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<sup>18</sup> Nehru to Gibarti, 2 May 1927, Baldwin Papers.

<sup>19</sup> Nehru to Gibarti, 2 May 1927, Baldwin Papers.

<sup>20</sup> Nehru to Gibarti, 2 May 1927, Baldwin Papers.

between the nationalist forces of the KMT under Chiang on the one hand, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and trade unionists on the other disintegrated into open hostility and conflict. On April 12, 1927, Chiang marched his military into Shanghai where strikes and communist activities against foreign imperialists had paralyzed the city for nearly a year. Rather than honor the KMT and communist alliance, Chiang defected from the united front and massacred thousands of suspected communists, trade unionists, workers, and peasants. He combined his forces with another faction of the KMT based in Wuhan under the leadership of Wang Jingwei, and together the two forces brutally suppressed communists and eliminated their presence from every major city in China by December 1927.<sup>21</sup> Chiang's coup had embarrassed Stalin and the Comintern, whose policy was to support the united front in China under the umbrella of the KMT as late as 1928. But it also proved problematic for the League against Imperialism, which had focused so much attention on the united front in China. Nehru doubted the League should host a "conference at the battle front."<sup>22</sup> He also thought the Indian National Congress unlikely to send delegates to China, and even if the INC did, the Government of India surely would not issue visas.

The letter once again suggested the secretariat should be moved permanently and immediately to Paris. Senghor had been released in May, and it seemed possible to

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Weiner, "Comintern in East Asia," in *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin*, Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew. (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997), 158-190. Chinese historians also see Chiang's turn against Communists in 1927 as a brutal action and catalyst in the country's history. See for example Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 1990), 334-360.

<sup>22</sup> Nehru to Gibarti, 2 May 1927, Baldwin Papers.



resume anti-imperial activities in France. Nehru thought Paris “is far the greatest international centre and has a tradition and atmosphere which no other city possesses.”<sup>23</sup> Amsterdam and Brussels were “out of the way,” and London’s “general conditions and atmosphere” were not conducive to the anti-imperial activities. A highly capable French national section of the League, which predated the Brussels Congress, could help, and Nehru thought the French government would be less inclined to interfere if Frenchmen were the key figures in the foundation of the office. More importantly, both Nehru and Baldwin were staying in Paris throughout the entire month of May. The two intended to personally oversee the relocation and the implementation of executive orders within the secretariat. Baldwin reiterated this in his letter to Nehru: “I only hope the office will be moved while you are there, to get some of the benefit of yours.”<sup>24</sup> The official secretariat did move to Paris, but only after Nehru left France for Switzerland. The move took place in July 1927, but the secretariat personnel remained the same and the Berlin office continued to function as well.

Overall, the letter captured a frustration shared by Nehru and Baldwin over the functioning of the secretaries and the directions in which they had taken the League in its first months of existence. It also demonstrated the ways Nehru came to identify himself as a member of a broader anti-imperial community. This is most evident when Nehru addressed the reluctance of several Indian National Congress leaders to respond to letters sent to India from Berlin. Nehru was keenly aware that the INC would not determine a

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<sup>23</sup> Nehru to Fimmen, 3 May 1927, with enclosed copy of letter to Gibarti cited above. Box 8, Folder 2, Baldwin Papers.

<sup>24</sup> Baldwin to Nehru, 7 May 1927, Box 8, Folder 2, Baldwin Papers.

clear policy and course for its relationship to the League until the all-India annual meeting later in December. But, Nehru also recognized the skepticism many in India would have toward outside organizations like the League. Nehru explained in this letter to the League secretary: “The difficulty is that *we* fail to realize that the outlook of *these* people in India is different from *our* [League] outlook. The only thing to do is to change *their* outlook and I am sure it can be done but it takes a little time and effort.”<sup>25</sup> [author’s emphasis] The use of “*we*” to define Nehru’s subject position in the letter situates himself as an anti-imperialist of the League in relation to “*these* people in India and *their* outlook.” This distinction should not be overstressed, but it should be used as a lens to see the ways Nehru identified himself as an active member of both the Indian nationalist and the League’s anti-imperialist communities in this moment.<sup>26</sup>

As the League secretariat developed along the lines that Nehru and Baldwin outlined, printed literature began pouring out of the center. On June 15, 1927, the Berlin office released its official notice to General Council and Executive Council members that the headquarters moved to Paris. The second statement congratulated Nehru for his fine work in encouraging the INC Working Committee to consider association with the League, and his dedication to sending favorable publicity on the Brussels Congress to India.<sup>27</sup> Other news related to a request by Indonesians in Holland to the League to send a

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<sup>25</sup> Nehru to Gibarti, 2 May 1927, Box 8, Folder 2, Baldwin Papers.

<sup>26</sup> On the possibilities for multiple and compatible identities within the context of globalization, see Lynn Hollen Lees, “Being British in Malaya,” *Journal of British Studies* 48 (January 2009), 76-101.

<sup>27</sup> League against Imperialism Circular Letter (from Berlin office), 15 June 1927, Copy intercepted and archived by the IPI, League against Imperialism Files, Fiche 320, IPI Papers.

commission to inquire into the conditions in Dutch Java and Sumatra. Also, the League updated the General Council on the intention to move forward with plans for the Hankau conference in China. In July 20, 1927, another circular, this time from Paris, underscored the activities of Leaguers in France, Britain, Egypt, Indonesia and Latin America.<sup>28</sup>

Literature also highlighted the links between diverse places, like India and China. For example, the press service of the League against Imperialism dated July 15, 1927 ran a story on the British Government's refusal of passports to Indian medical volunteers seeking to go to China to provide humanitarian aid.<sup>29</sup>

Through these circulars, Nehru came to strengthen his knowledge of a global geography of anti-imperialism, while also recognizing his work at the national and international levels as interconnected and mutually interdependent. The League's institutional networks are vital to understanding the construction of an anti-imperial community in wake of the Brussels Congress. The League secretariat recast local struggles as part of a worldwide campaign against oppression. This allowed readers of the League's literature to be integrated into a community of anti-imperialism where each was a witness and partner to other movements within the League, as well as an active contributor to the discourse. Nehru was kept abreast of the events in spatially distant places once considered peripheral but now a participant in the everyday vernacular of a closely connected anti-imperial resistance. The common issues of oppression, resistance,

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<sup>28</sup> League against Imperialism Circular Letter (from Paris Office), 20 July 1927. 542/1/10/15, CI Papers.

<sup>29</sup> Press Service of the League against Imperialism and for National Independence, 15 July 1927, published jointly by Paris and Berlin office. Copy archived in 542/1/5/65-68, CI Papers.

and emancipation were at stake for the Leaguers across the twentieth-century world, and the League publications began to provide a consistent stream of materials that reminded Nehru that he was not alone in his struggles for national and social justice.

Special reports from the League center also informed Nehru of the complex conditions in places like China. In July, a co-secretary of the League, Liau Hansin, circulated an important report drafted by Chan Kuen, Brussels delegate representing the All-Chinese Trade Union Federation, who had returned to China in May 1927 to find a crisis unfolding. Chan provided a firsthand account of the Northern Expedition of Chiang. “The Chinese bourgeoisie with General Chiang Kai-shek at its head allied itself with the imperialists in order to crush its onetime ally the working class.”<sup>30</sup> Chan appealed to the oppressed of the world to extend moral support and solidarity to the workers of China who were repressed by the double yoke of Chinese bourgeoisie and foreign imperialists. The cover letter from Liau and the report from Chan both urged Leaguers across the world to protest “upon humanitarian grounds or upon revolutionary grounds” the behavior of Chiang, his military and the KMT.<sup>31</sup>

The League offered information and perspectives on China that were not available in mainstream media outlets in Europe or India, both filtered through imperial lenses. Nehru wrote an article for Indian publication on the Chinese situation and reminded readers, “The news that India receives about the Chinese struggle comes almost entirely from prejudiced sources .... We should be on guard against this and not be misled by the

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<sup>30</sup> League against Imperialism Circular on China, undated July 1927, 542/1/18/38, CI Papers.

<sup>31</sup> LAI, Circular on China, July 1927.

exaggerated and misleading reports.”<sup>32</sup> This is not to say that the League’s press service was not exaggerated or polemic, but it offered Nehru a new reference point for information and ideas outside the metropolitan and imperial spheres. The Chinese circular also illustrated the ways the League was more than a tool for learning, but also an outlet for Nehru to express his grievances and protests to the wider community of anti-imperialists. The Chinese circular appeals to readers like Nehru to voice opposition and be heard. Indeed, Nehru could send his words of sympathy and solidarity to the Paris or Berlin office, where it would be redistributed to China and across the anti-imperial world.

By the time of the second executive council meeting in Cologne in August, Nehru boasted a high profile within the League, and his work on the secretariat paved the way for a more professional and organized center of international anti-imperial activities. Nehru’s agency had been essential in the initial formulations for the center and its general direction. While the League’s meeting spaces and secretariat were in Europe, those engaged in the process of guiding the institution - like Nehru and even Baldwin – were often not European. Nehru’s executive work, too, provided more opportunities to interact with some of his comrades in the executive council like Baldwin, which formed the basis for Nehru’s anti-imperial connections with the American comrade for years to come. In Cologne, Baldwin introduced Nehru to the American Red Scare, the anxieties over the threat of communist expansion into the U.S., by taking him to a rally against the Sacco-Vanzetti Case (1927), a controversial U.S. trial against two suspected anarchists.

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<sup>32</sup> Nehru, “The Situation in China and India’s Duty,” originally published in *The Volunteer*, April 1927, repr. in *SWJN*, vol. 2, 328.

Immediately following the executive meeting, the two traveled together to Dusseldorf for the political rally. Here, Nehru received further education on the left's criticism of the United States government.

One of the principal discussions at the second executive meeting in Cologne had concerned the League against Imperialism commission to be sent to Java for three months to observe Dutch imperial oppression on the ground. In conjunction with this, P.J. Schmidt, vice president of the Dutch League, drafted a statement on the dire situation in the Dutch East Indies. A series of uprisings in 1926 and 1927 in Java and Sumatra resulted in a repressive crack down on activists in Indonesia and Holland.<sup>33</sup> Schmidt suggested that Dutch authorities were going to great lengths to link nationalists to communism as a means to further fuel the repressive measures of the colonial state. "The [Dutch] rulers may provoke and suppress, they may kill and murder to fill their prisons, but they will never succeed in killing the spirit of revolt of the Indonesian workers and intellectuals."<sup>34</sup> Nehru was moved by the plight of the Indonesian nationalists and workers, and he would later write a foreword for Schmidt's book on imperialism.<sup>35</sup> Nehru also had more opportunities to discuss the shared experience of European imperialism and anti-colonialism with Mohamed Hatta, the Indonesia executive member. Once again,

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<sup>33</sup> Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> P.J. Schmidt, Statement on Dutch Java and Sumatra, November 1927, 542/1/5/138-139, CI Papers.

<sup>35</sup> This article was originally written for P.J. Schmidt's *The Imperialist Danger* in May 1928, but also published in the Indian National Congress publication, *The Tribune* on 24 July 1929, repr. in *SWJN*, vol.3, 151-158.

his encounters through the meeting spaces of the League continued to enhance his geography of anti-imperial resistance.

By mid-1927 Nehru's political vision and activities straddled two spheres- the discourse and circuits of an interconnected world of anti-imperialists struggling against oppression, as well as the local politics of India's anti-colonial struggle against the raj. For Nehru, the distinction between home and away, local and global, India and world was blurred; and the national mission was to be intimately linked to the global struggle against empires. This had been a dynamic process in which Nehru had been an agent and student in the political world of anti-imperialism. For Nehru, Indian independence could be the catalyst for the end of the British Empire, but India had much to learn from others and could only wreck global imperialism through cooperation across the world of anti-imperialism.

### 3.2 Nehru's Statement on Indian Nationalism in an International World

Nehru's experiences with the League against Imperialism inspired him to make his first comprehensive statement addressed to an Indian audience on the relationship between India and the world in September 1927 entitled, "A Foreign Policy for India."<sup>36</sup> No other statement so eloquently demonstrated the impact on him of the internationalist ethos of the 1920s and the League's expanded geography of anti-imperialism. Nehru began by painting the landscape of world politics to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the world in the 1920s and the necessity for India to engage with others around the

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<sup>36</sup> Nehru, "A Foreign Policy For India," 13 September 1927, *SWJN*, vol. 2, 348-364.

globe. Much of the statement is worth citing in detail here. Nehru argued that no country can remain isolated from the world: “a shooting in London is followed by a murder in Warsaw and many executions in Moscow, and has its reverberations on the North-West Frontier in India. France, the most intensely national of countries, cannot have a minister who interferes too much with the plans of high finance of New York...”<sup>37</sup> He went on to characterize this interconnected world as one linked by powerful capitalists and imperialists: “We talk of labour and socialist internationals but the greatest and most powerful international organizations today are those of capital and finance which control the governments of even so-called democratic countries and bring about war and peace.”<sup>38</sup> Nehru also demonstrated his heightened knowledge of other regions of the world and the links between capitalism and imperial expansion: “The American marines take possession of Nicaragua because Messrs. Brown Brothers of New York have money invested there...” Meanwhile, “China cannot be free because too much British and Japanese capital is locked up there.”<sup>39</sup> In this world context, Nehru argued “India cannot keep apart from this tangled web, and her refusing to take heed of it may indeed lead her to disaster...”<sup>40</sup>

What is India to do then? According to Nehru, international connections are the only solution to contest the global flows of capitalism and imperialism. He reminded his

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<sup>37</sup> Nehru, “Foreign Policy,” 352.

<sup>38</sup> Nehru, “Foreign Policy,” 353.

<sup>39</sup> Nehru, “Foreign Policy,” 353.

<sup>40</sup> Nehru, “Foreign Policy,” 353.



India audience that the INC abandoned foreign propaganda in 1923 because it did little to foster sympathy in the metropole. He argued that international connections should not seek out sympathy or help from the empire, but rather establish contact with other places and “take part in international joint action when this is to our advantage.”<sup>41</sup> One of the simplest lessons espoused in Brussels was that each nationalist struggle is not alone and that “your suffering is my suffering.”<sup>42</sup> Nehru passed along this message to India in his statement: “Let us remember that there are many countries and many peoples who suffer as India does today. They have to face the same problems as ours and it must be to the advantage of both of us to know more of each other and to cooperate where possible.”<sup>43</sup> For Nehru, the INC involvement in the Brussels Congress and League against Imperialism were steps in the right direction.

The most fundamental shift for Nehru, of course, was his vision for India to be free to develop relationships with international partners outside the metropole and the imperial framework. Nehru tackled this issue by emphasizing that the British Empire was outdated. Canada and Australia were gravitating toward the United States. If India were to join as a Dominion State, it would never be treated with parity and would always subordinate its interests for those of the metropole. Taking his lessons learned from the Egyptian case at Brussels, Nehru argued that independence “may mean very little if it is of the type which prevails in Egypt today, with a foreign army of occupation to overawe

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<sup>41</sup> Nehru, “Foreign Policy,” 353.

<sup>42</sup> Bakar Ali Mirza, “The Congress against Imperialism,” *Modern Review*, May 1927, File 25, Bridgeman Papers.

<sup>43</sup> Nehru, “Foreign Policy,” 353.

the National Parliament and British cruisers to enforce the decisions of the British Cabinet.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore, “It is not conceivable that India can remain within the British group of nations and yet be mistress of her destiny... The only possible goal we can have is one of full independence.”<sup>45</sup> To be sure, Nehru argued that India could maintain a relationship with Britain, but it should also be free to join other affiliations and communities beyond the empire. Nehru’s preference, of course, would be for India to join an international community of nations. India:

... may if she chooses, and I trust she will so choose, agree to give up a measure of freedom of action to an international body of which she is a member for the sake of world peace... It is becoming increasingly clear that international peace cannot be found if each nation jealously guards its full sovereignty, and the League of Nations which sits at Geneva is proving a dismal failure because the governments of Europe do not desire peace and will not even agree to compulsory arbitration... But should a real League of Nations arise working for peace and taking necessary guarantees for peace from its component members, India should gladly join and agree to all such guarantees.<sup>46</sup>

The specific recommendations Nehru made for the contacts and connections for India to create abroad mirror the peoples and countries he encountered in his expanding geography of anti-imperialism. Foremost, India should foster relations with the “East,” meaning China, Indonesia, Annam, Japan, Central Asia, Persia, Turkey and Egypt. Note Egypt once again is included in this mainly Asian construction of the “East.” Much like his reports on Brussels, Nehru mentioned little about Latin America and Africa in his discussion of the geography of anti-imperialism. Nehru went on to suggest that India

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<sup>44</sup> Nehru, “Foreign Policy,” 354.

<sup>45</sup> Nehru, “Foreign Policy,” 357.

<sup>46</sup> Nehru, “Foreign Policy,” 354-355.

should nurture its ties to Europe, but it should consider most important its relationship to Soviet Russia. He stressed that the INC need not accept a social program based on the Soviet model, but India should know that Russia has stood “in favour of the fullest self-determination of various peoples. She has always been for the oppressed and the exploited.”<sup>47</sup> But he had one reservation about the Russians, namely that the Soviets had an expansionist impulse and could develop into a “new type of imperialism.”<sup>48</sup> Nehru could look beyond the rose-tinted glasses and see Russia as a potential danger in the future, but nevertheless India still had much to learn from the experimental development of the Soviet-style state and economy. And lastly, Nehru made special mention of India’s responsibility to ensure that Indians abroad were treated fairly and protected, no doubt a tribute to his burgeoning relationship to Chatto.<sup>49</sup>

Overall, Nehru’s statement clearly reflected a broader vision for India and the world informed by his encounters and experiences through the Brussels Congress and the League. But Nehru had some unsavory lessons to learn about internationalism from his comrades in imperialist countries that professed an anti-imperial agenda. We turn now to the darker side of Nehru’s interactions and exchanges with socialists and the British Labour Party.

### 3.3 Resistance to the League from the Labour and Socialist International

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<sup>47</sup> Nehru, “Foreign Policy,” 362.

<sup>48</sup> Nehru, “Foreign Policy,” 362.

<sup>49</sup> Nehru, “Foreign Policy,” 362-363.

In August 1927, Fenner Brockway, chairman of the British Independent Labour Party and member of the executive on the Labour and Socialist International (LSI), published a brief article on the Brussels Congress and League against Imperialism. Of Brussels, he effusively remarked: “As one looked on the sea of black, brown, yellow, and white faces one felt that here at last was something approaching a Parliament of Mankind.”<sup>50</sup> Compare this with the LSI, said Brockway, where “there was no ‘coloured’ representative among the thousands of delegates.”<sup>51</sup> [Quotations in the original] Brockway was perplexed by the LSI’s resistance to cooperating with such an epic and progressive institution, and he argued to his socialist audience that it would be “suicidal” not to join the League because, “It has done what the Socialist International has failed to do – seriously begun the task of uniting the proletarian movements among the coloured races.”<sup>52</sup> Brockway concluded with an appeal to the ILP to work with the League to unite the socialist movement with the workers in the colonies. The League “may easily prove to be one of the most significant movements for equality and freedom in human history.”<sup>53</sup> By the time of this publication, Brockway was deeply entrenched in a heated battle between socialists within the LSI and the British left over the League against Imperialism.

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<sup>50</sup> Fenner Brockway, “The Coloured Peoples’ International,” *The New Leader*, 26 August 1927. Extract in League against Imperialism Files, Fiche 321-322, IPI Papers.

<sup>51</sup> Brockway, “Coloured Peoples’,” IPI Papers.

<sup>52</sup> Brockway, “Coloured Peoples’,” IPI Papers.

<sup>53</sup> Brockway, “Coloured Peoples’,” IPI Papers.

These battles being waged within the British League reflect broader and more fundamental antagonisms between socialists of the LSI and communists of the Third International or Comintern.<sup>54</sup> Both professed to be descendents of the First International (1864-1876), founded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to unite workers internationally for a worldwide struggle against capitalism. The Second International (1889-1914) established a loose federation of socialist organizations from across Europe, although its largest section was the German Social Democratic Party. Key points of contention emerged between members of the Second International, especially over the means of attaining socialist change. One camp (often labeled revisionists) sought gradual or evolutionary socialist reforms within existing capitalist states, while the other considered revolution and the overthrow of the existing state a necessary prerequisite for change.<sup>55</sup> When World War I broke out, the divisions between these camps reached a fever pitch. Reformist sections from France, Germany and Britain backed their respective nation's capitalist classes in the war, while revolutionaries called for international solidarity in opposition to the war. The split led the revolutionary forces to gravitate toward the Third International or Communist International, founded by Lenin in 1920 after the Bolshevik Revolution and establishment of the Soviet State. The reformists regrouped after the war

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<sup>54</sup> For a history of the First, Second and Third Internationals, see Julius Braunthal, *History of the International*. 3 vols (New York: Praeger, 1967).

<sup>55</sup> For a classic text on socialist reformism, see Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation*, rev. ed. (1909; repr., New York: Schocken Books, 1961). For the revolutionary perspective see V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, rev. ed. (1917; repr., Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2009).

and formed the LSI, but deep animosities and distrust between the LSI and Comintern persisted throughout the interwar years.

The LSI prohibited members from joining any organization connected to the Comintern. Immediately following the Brussels Congress, the LSI launched an investigation of the accuracy of reports on the inaugural meeting, and this questioning led to outright accusations of exaggerated attendance and the most damning claim that the League was a communist front organization controlled and funded by Moscow.<sup>56</sup> Nehru noted early on the attitude of the LSI at Brussels: “A major difficulty was an attack by an official of the Second International, who stated that the Congress was engineered by the Third International.”<sup>57</sup> Because of this, it “was at one time feared that British Labour as well as some other important trade unions would keep away.”<sup>58</sup> The resistance from the LSI spilled over into the internal politics of the British left. In April 1927 Lansbury, Brockway, Bridgeman and others met in the House of Commons and resolved to create a national branch of the League against Imperialism in London. Brockway had been the driving force behind the decision, but he and his comrades from both the LP and ILP agreed that their activities with the League would need to be approved by the LSI. Brockway became the chairman of the national section, while Reginald Bridgeman (secretary) and Lansbury (treasurer) also held offices. The British League decided that

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<sup>56</sup> See Jean Jones, *The League Against Imperialism*, Socialist History Occasional Pamphlet Series (Lancashire: The Socialist History Society and the Lancashire Community Press, 1996).

<sup>57</sup> Nehru, Brussels Report, *SWJN*, vol. 2, 287.

<sup>58</sup> Nehru, Brussels Report, 287.

funds should come from British sources only, and the members collected subscriptions from the LP, ILP and other organizations on the left.<sup>59</sup>

Nehru was present at the second meeting of the British League in June 1927. At this meeting, Lansbury buckled under the pressure of the LP and LSI and announced his resignation from the chairmanship of the international League against Imperialism and from his position as treasurer of the British League.<sup>60</sup> As we saw in the last chapter, Nehru had admired Lansbury's speech at Brussels as "eloquent and...proof that the Congress was not so rabid after all, nor was it merely hitched on to the star of Communism."<sup>61</sup> The reversal of Lansbury's commitment to the League in June greatly disappointed Nehru: "I was hurt by this sudden change in a person whose speech I had admired only two or three months earlier."<sup>62</sup> The British League survived the June shakeup, however, and continued under the management of Brockway and Bridgeman. By the time Brockway published his defense of the League in August, the LSI was deciding the fate of members of both the League and the LSI. On September 2, the LSI concluded that the League was a tool of the Comintern and therefore a proscribed organization. With the announcement of the LSI judgment, Brockway, in order to preserve his place on the LSI executive, was forced to resign from his posts on both the

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<sup>59</sup> Reginald Bridgeman, "Secretary's Report" in Report of the National Conference of the League Against Imperialism (British Section), February 1931, (London: League Against Imperialism, 1931).

<sup>60</sup> Lansbury did promise to remain a member of the British League and attended a July meeting, although he left the organization shortly after. For a history of the British League, see Bridgeman, "Secretary's Report," February 1931.

<sup>61</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 171.

<sup>62</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 172.

international and national Leagues. It is important to note, however, that LP and ILP members without connections to the LSI executive continued to associate with the League until the Labour Party deemed it a proscribed organization in November 1929.<sup>63</sup>

Of the three primary organizers of the British League, only Reginald Bridgeman remained, but at the cost of losing his membership in the LP for nearly a decade.<sup>64</sup> Nehru admired Bridgeman's courage and came to know him well over the years to come. The Englishman had become an active anti-imperialist through his early experiences and travels as a foreign diplomat during and immediately after the First World War. Stationed in Tehran (1921-1922) as part of the British Legation, Bridgeman ruffled the feathers of the British Foreign Office when he developed amicable relations with the Soviet Minister, Theodore Rothstein. His stay in Tehran, coupled with trips to India before and after his appointment, transformed Bridgeman into a lifelong anti-imperialist. Although his roots in anti-imperialism were grounded in Persia and India, Bridgeman's first anti-imperial campaign was his work with the Chinese Information Bureau in 1925. The Bureau disseminated propaganda and offered Bridgeman excellent practice for his later role as the British League secretary, a role he would hold until 1933 when the international League center moved to London from Berlin and he served as the international secretary until 1937. In 1927 Nehru's encounters with Bridgeman through the League's committee offered both men an opportunity to establish a professional relationship that lasted well into the 1930s and beyond. Nehru's observations of the

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<sup>63</sup> Bridgeman, "Secretary's Report," February 1931.

<sup>64</sup> *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol. 7, ed. by Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), s.v. "Reginald Bridgeman," 40-49.



British left struggle in 1927, too, offered instructive lessons about the trustworthiness of international-minded leaders in the metropole.

The British League retained a very active and preeminent place among the national sections of the League against Imperialism. At the end of 1927 in the aftermath of socialist resignations, James Maxton, MP from Glasgow, took over the chairmanship of the League, and Reginald Bridgeman remained the secretary. Maxton, a key figure of the ILP, was somewhat of a renegade of the British Left. He openly criticized the LP and moderate socialists in the House of Commons and eventually led the ILP to break with the LP in 1931.<sup>65</sup> He was a suitable replacement because he secured permission from the ILP to chair both the national and international Leagues. Maxton may have presided, but Bridgeman was the heart and soul of the British League office. Nehru considered Bridgeman to be “one of the very few Englishmen who can view the Indian question minus the English prejudices.”<sup>66</sup>

With labour leaders like Bridgeman and Maxton at the helm of the British League in 1928, Nehru made the case that the LAI was not purely communist. In an INC circular, Nehru argued against accusations by the raj that the League was a communist organization. According to Nehru, the League is “evidently not approved of by the British Government and every effort is made by them to make it appear that it is a communist organization... To call the League a purely communist organization is to

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<sup>65</sup> Anand, Vidya Sagar and Francis A. Ridley. *James Maxton and British Socialism* (London: Medusa Press, 1970); and Gordon Brown, *Maxton* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1986).

<sup>66</sup> Nehru to Shiva Prasad Gupta, 27 June 1929, File 4, LAI Papers, PC Joshi Archives, New Delhi. This was a letter of introduction to Gupta, who was attending a League against Imperialism in 1929.

misrepresent it utterly or to exhibit amazing ignorance.”<sup>67</sup> He supported this claim by drawing upon the participation of the British League: “The League’s first president was Mr. Lansbury who has no love for communists... The Chairman of the Executive Committee is James Maxton MP who is also the president of the Independent Labour Party of Great Britain.”<sup>68</sup> Nehru concluded: “Communists are undoubtedly the strongest opponents of imperialism today and as such their cooperation is welcomed, but in no sense do they dominate.”<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless as LSI members across Britain and Europe withdrew from the League because of its suspected ties to Moscow and the Comintern, the complexion of the anti-imperial institution began to shift towards communism. The British LP withdrawal was only the first of several successive ones in 1927 and 1928. For example, the very active Dutch League against Imperialism collapsed when founders like P.J. Schmidt and others were forced to resign under the pressure of the Dutch Social Democratic Party. At the same time, more communists came to the international and national sections to fill the void left by fleeing socialists. For example, Shapurji Saklatvala, an Indian-born expatriate and member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), replaced the vacancies left on the executive by Lansbury and Brockway. The shift toward a more communist composition would only sharpen as non-communist leaders like Nehru left Europe for their respective colonies.

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<sup>67</sup> “Congress Bulletin,” Issued by the Office of the All India Congress Committee, 22 March 1929, File 41-1929, AICC Papers.

<sup>68</sup> “Congress Bulletin, 22 March 1929, AICC Papers.

<sup>69</sup> “Congress Bulletin, 22 March 1929, AICC Papers.

Even after Nehru left India, he wrote to Roger Baldwin about the problems of maintaining a balance between communists and non-communists within the League. Baldwin remained in Europe for several months after Nehru's departure, and he became one of Nehru's critical links to the League after his departure. Baldwin was sympathetic to the communist cause, but the two knew the dangers of an anti-imperialist agenda dictated by the Soviet Union.<sup>70</sup> Baldwin wrote to Nehru to warn him of the domineering presence of communists. Baldwin wrote: "there were too many communists present, who insisted on following lines of Communist propaganda—which is after all, entirely to my way of thinking, so far as the colonial issue is concerned. But we don't need an abundance of communists to push what we all agree on, and we certainly ought to steer clear of communist phraseology."<sup>71</sup> Baldwin concluded his report to Nehru with the assessment: "My judgment is that the League will continue to exist, but that its financial necessities are going to force it to seek support more and more from the left—which means the communist and Russian trade unions. The socialists are boycotting it, and the colonial peoples are too poor to keep it going, although they have come across handsomely so far."<sup>72</sup> To be sure, the most pressing question remained whether the League against Imperialism could continue without the international non-communist left. This question would dominate discussions and negotiations between Nehru and his League colleagues in the years to come.

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<sup>70</sup> Nehru's report to the AICC dated 19 February 1927, File G29- 1927, AICC Papers.

<sup>71</sup> Baldwin to Nehru, 12 December 1927, Box8, Folder 2, Baldwin Papers.

<sup>72</sup> Baldwin to Nehru, 12 December 1927.

It is somewhat paradoxical that Nehru came to be a professed socialist during the same moment socialists turned their backs on anti-imperialism in the League. Given the failure of the British and international left to cooperate with the anti-imperial resistance campaign of the League, it would seem logical that Nehru might cast a skeptical eye on the international socialist enterprise. Instead from 1927 to 1929, he articulated his belief in socialism as the answer not only to India's problems with the raj, but also to poverty and social inequality within the subcontinent. He did so privately in the Brussels Congress report to the INC, and publicly in articles in the India press like "Socialism and Swaraj."<sup>73</sup> When he presided over the INC session in 1929, which accepted his *purna swaraj* declaration, he used the platform to state clearly and emphatically that he was a socialist.<sup>74</sup> To some extent, it is Nehru's encounter with communism that profoundly shaped his belief in the Marxist-Leninist critique of capitalism and imperialism. But Nehru, as an advocate of non-violence, could not accept the Leninist doctrine of violent revolution and dictatorship of the proletariat. It was his trip to Soviet Russia that encouraged him to consider the merits of Marxism-Leninism and begin to formulate a more international and national plan that integrated these ideas.

### 3.4 Soviet Russia Bound

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<sup>73</sup> Nehru, Report on the Brussels Congress, *SWJN*, vol. 2, 287; and "Swaraj and Socialism," 11 August 1928, *SWJN*, vol. 3, 369 – 371.

<sup>74</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address at the 1929 INC sessions in Lahore, repr. in *India and the World: Essays by Jawaharlal Nehru* (George Allen and Unwin: London, 1936).

Before departing for India, Nehru had a chance to see Soviet Russia firsthand. He traveled there with his entire family including his father, Motilal, who arrived in Europe in October. The Society for Cultural Relations with the Soviet Union extended the formal invitation to Nehru and other members of the League against Imperialism. It was through the League channels and the Berlin office that the elder and younger Nehru received the request of their attendance.<sup>75</sup> The Nehrus traveled by train from Berlin to Moscow via Poland. It was a lengthy excursion given that the Nehrus planned to stay only three days in the Russian capital. The Nehrus and many others had been invited in November 1927 to attend the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the revolution, although the Nehru family missed the main festivities by a day.

Nevertheless, Nehru had enough time to observe Soviet Russia. He was impressed: “The picture I carry away from Russia is one of admiration for the men who accomplished so much within a few years in spite of all the disadvantages that one can imagine.”<sup>76</sup> The Bolshevik Revolution, according to Nehru, had been, “undoubtedly one of the great events of world history, the greatest since the first French Revolution.”<sup>77</sup> During their stay, the Nehrus visited the Museum of Revolution, the opera, and a motion picture theatre for a viewing of *The Last Days of Petrograd*, a film favorably depicting

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<sup>75</sup> “Information Bulletin for the Executive Committee, No.3” League against Imperialism Secretariat, 3 November 1927, 542/1/5/82, CI Papers.

<sup>76</sup> Nehru to his sister, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, 12 November 1927, *SWJN*, vol. 2, 371.

<sup>77</sup> Nehru, “Impressions of Moscow,” repr. in *SWJN*, vol. 2, 386-390.

Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution.<sup>78</sup> Nehru thought Moscow was unlike any city in Europe: “Paris is supposed to be the greatest international centre of Europe. One comes across people from all countries there, but they are all in the standard costume of the West... But in Moscow Asia peeps out from every corner...its streets and squares full of strange peoples from East and the West.”<sup>79</sup>

Nehru’s trip to Moscow sparked a newfound admiration for Soviet Russia and the Marxist-Leninist doctrine more generally. Afterwards, he would become an avid reader of any literature on the subject that he could find. By the time he returned to India, Nehru read and recommended texts on communism by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky. He also familiarized himself with the major debates within communism and in particular those between revisionists like Eduard Berstein and Karl Kautsky on the one hand, and revolutionaries like Lenin on the other.<sup>80</sup> Nehru wrote articles for the Indian press on the theories, histories, and observations of Soviet Russia that were eventually collected and published in a book in India.<sup>81</sup> He also came to regard Soviet Russia as a haven for anti-imperialism and a stalwart against the British Empire in particular. Nehru argued that Britain was the only obstacle in the way of amicable and friendly relations between India and Russia: “Ordinarily Russia and India should live as the best of neighbors with the fewest points of friction. The continual friction that we see today is between England and

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<sup>78</sup> Nehru, “Impressions,” 386-390.

<sup>79</sup> Nehru, “Impressions,” 387, 390.

<sup>80</sup> Nehru, “Some Books on Russia,” repr. in *SWJN*, vol. 2, 399 - 402.

<sup>81</sup> Nehru, *Soviet Russia*, repr. in *SWJN*, vol. 2, 379-451.

Russia, not between India and Russia. Is there any reason why we in India should inherit the age-long rivalry of England and Russia? That is based on the greed and covetousness of British imperialism and our interests surely lie in ending this imperialism and not in supporting and strengthening it... India has nothing to fear from Russia...we shall not permit ourselves to be used as pawns in England's imperial game to be moved hither and tither for her benefit.”<sup>82</sup>

Moscow, not Brussels, created Nehru's admiration for Soviet Russia. He found there lessons India could learn about socialism, communism, and state development outside an imperial state. India could learn from Lenin who, “realized, what we in India are dimly beginning to appreciate, that it is a difficult, if not an impossible task, for amateurs with little time to spare from their daily routine and no special training, to fight whole-timers who are experts at their business of defending the existing regime.”<sup>83</sup> But more importantly, Soviet Russia inherited from the Tsar a primarily agrarian and poverty stricken country. India, too, would be the heir of a similar situation if the British were to leave. Of Russia and India, Nehru writes, “Both are vast agricultural countries with only the beginnings of industrialization, and both have to face poverty and illiteracy. If Russia finds a satisfactory solution for these, our work in India is made easier.”<sup>84</sup> Even Nehru's father, a more conservative moderate in the INC, admitted with some hesitation that there could be much to learn from the Soviet model. He later said that *swaraj* must also, “be

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<sup>82</sup> Nehru “Russia and India,” repr. in *SWJN*, vol. 2, 450-451.

<sup>83</sup> Nehru, “Russia and India,” 450-451.

<sup>84</sup> Nehru, “The Fascination of Russia,” repr. In *SWJN*, vol.2, 382.

independence of the workers and peasants.”<sup>85</sup> And, “What I saw in Russia I admired, but the conclusion I have come to is this – the Soviet Government is trying a gigantic experiment. It is not yet past the stage of experiment, even they admit.”<sup>86</sup> The strong central state and the planning commission for the Five Year Plans were models that impressed the Nehrus, and Jawaharlal would later seek to learn and implement these methods in independent India.

Beyond the anti-imperial relationship between India and Russia, Nehru also came to encounter in Moscow his most important and valued connection to China, Madame Sun Yat-Sen. Born as Soong Ch’ing-ling, Madame Sun Yat-sen was the widow of the late Dr. Sun Yat-Sen (1866-1925), the pioneer of the nationalist movement in China.<sup>87</sup> Her sister, Soong Mei-ling, married General Chiang Kai-shek, the political heir of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen. Nehru admitted that Madame Sun “fascinated” him.<sup>88</sup> He wrote of her: “She is delightful, looks twenty five and is full of life and energy.”<sup>89</sup> Nehru knew of Madame Sun from the Brussels Congress where she had not attended but sent messages of support and served as an honorary president. But the personal encounter with Madame Sun crystallized Nehru’s admiration and ties with China. In the last chapter, we saw that Nehru had not been particularly impressed with the Chinese delegates at Brussels, but the

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<sup>85</sup> Motilal Nehru, Statement at the League against Imperialism General Council meeting, 9 December 1927, 542/1/14/11, CI Papers.

<sup>86</sup> Motilal Nehru, Statement, CI Papers.

<sup>87</sup> Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mme Sun Yat-sen*. (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1986).

<sup>88</sup> Nehru to Vijayalakshmi Pandit, 12 November 1927, *SWJN*, vol. 2, 371.

<sup>89</sup> Nehru to Vijayalakshmi Pandit, 371.



chance meeting in Moscow with Madame Sun changed this impression. Nehru had also taken the opportunity of meeting Madame Sun to personally extend an invitation to her to go to India for the annual INC meeting in December. She accepted and applied for a visa through Berlin only to be denied by the British Government.<sup>90</sup>

While the British LP and members of the LSI gravely disappointed Nehru, the sights and people in Moscow captured his heart and mind. He returned to India a changed man and it had much to do with the League against Imperialism and his trip to Moscow. The Soviet sojourn had convinced him that Russia was indeed an alternative to the old world of imperialism. He wrote that Russia has “upset the old order of things and brought a new world into existence, where values have changed utterly and old standards have given place to new... Russia thus interests us because it may help up to find some solution for the great problems which face the world today.”<sup>91</sup> And, Nehru had a new friend and colleague from China. She would be an important person in both his imagined and tangible connections between India and China, as well as a facilitator in introducing him to the commander of the KMT, Chiang Kai-shek.

### 3. 5 Conclusion

As his December 1927 departure from Europe drew closer, Nehru not only imagined himself and India as part of an international community, but he also had an arsenal of partners against imperialism. Nehru and this unlikely cast of radical leftists

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<sup>90</sup> “Refusal of a passport to Mme. Sun Yat Sen,” League against Imperialism Files, Fiche 327, IPI Papers.

<sup>91</sup> Nehru, “The Fascination of Russia,” repr. in *SWJN*, vol. 2, 382.

collectively envisioned a world free of imperial chains. His expanded geography of anti-imperialism enveloped Nehru into a community that extended beyond the Indian subcontinent to cities as spatially distant as Jakarta, Berlin, New York, London, Moscow, and Canton. Much to his dismay, the League's numbers of international socialists and trade unionists dwindled in the fall 1927. Without the international socialists and British Labourites, non-communists like Nehru would become the powerful balance to the overwhelming presence of communism in the executive council and secretariat. To be sure, Nehru had proved to be instrumental in the first months of the League's organizational uncertainty. More than ever, the shifting contours of the League in 1927 required Nehru to build a strong coalition of non-communists to balance the power of the Communist International in the League. Much was at stake for the tenuous anti-imperial alliances between Nehru, India, and the international League. Nehru also knew the INC would not associate with his anti-imperial League if it became a communist dominated institution, and the movement itself could not function properly without an inclusive space for anti-imperialists of any political persuasion. As 1927 came to a close and Nehru packed his bags, his fragile connections across the anti-imperial world had been forged and he left for India in 1927 to take some of the greatest political risks of his career.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: INTERNATIONALIZING NATIONALISM IN INDIA**

On December 4, 1927, Jawaharlal, Kamala, and Indira Nehru boarded the S.S. Angers in Marseilles, France and bid farewell to the European continent that had been home for nearly two years. During his time in Europe, Jawaharlal Nehru became deeply involved in the politics of the League against Imperialism, and his work on the executive council firmly established him as a pivotal partner in the international struggle against empires. As a consequence of his multi-faceted participation in the League against Imperialism, Nehru's political and intellectual horizons were no longer bounded by locality and nation, but were part of a wider international network of exchanges with people and ideas from countries as spatially distant as the United States, Soviet Union, China, Egypt, and Indonesia. As he set sail, Nehru drafted a letter to Chatto in Berlin about the League and his role within it: "We have occasionally to take risks in building a big organization. Let us take them and not be afraid of them. So far as I am concerned I shall always be glad to be of every service to it [the League]."<sup>1</sup> Nehru knew the distance between India and the Berlin center would hinder his League activities, but he remained a committed partner in the international campaign against imperialism. This chapter focuses on Nehru's international and national activities from India after his return in December 1927.

Nehru contemplated a number of "political risks" on the eve of his homecoming to India. Onboard ship, he drafted several resolutions to present to the annual Indian

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<sup>1</sup> Nehru to Chatto, 11 December 1927, File 16, Chattopadhyaya Papers, PC Joshi Archives, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.

National Congress meeting that would internationalize the colonial question in India. First, Nehru aspired to internationalize the Indian National Congress campaign by pushing forward an agenda that sought national sovereignty and membership in an international community of nations rather than Dominion Status within the British Empire. I explore Nehru's strategies for incorporating this international vision into the official program and everyday practices of the INC. Second, I map the connections Nehru forged between India and the disparate strands he encountered in Brussels and through the League. Despite the distance, he maintained an active profile in the League against Imperialism and continued to engage in a dialogue with colleagues across his international geography of the anti-imperial resistance. Third, this chapter concludes with an analysis of the opportunities and limitations of India's connections with the anti-imperialist world in the late 1920s. I focus on the desire of Nehru and the League secretary to send delegates from the anti-imperialist community to India to participate in the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress and the All-India Trade Union Congress at the end of 1928.

#### 4.1 The International Question, Nehru, and the Indian National Congress

Nehru's autobiography is particularly revealing about his intentions on the eve of his homecoming to India. Aside from feeling rested and recharged by his trip to Europe, Nehru commented on his new political vision for India: "My outlook was wider and nationalism by itself seemed to me definitely a narrow and insufficient creed. Political freedom, independence, were no doubt essential, but they were steps only in the right

direction; without social freedom and socialistic structure of society and the State, neither the country nor the individual could develop much.”<sup>2</sup> Through his travels and encounters, Nehru had found Europe, America and Soviet Russia a “fascinating study.”<sup>3</sup> He captured in his autobiography, too, the shifting contours of the world he encountered in Europe: “Europe, in the middle ‘twenties, was trying to settle down in a way, the great depression was yet to come.”<sup>4</sup> He knew, however, that “big eruptions and mighty changes were in store” for the world, and when he returned to the Indian political scene in Madras he set out on a mission to “train and prepare our country for these world events.”<sup>5</sup>

Nehru aimed to convince his INC colleagues that Dominion Status within the British Empire was futile and obsolescent for the postwar international world. He wrote in his autobiography that independence was “the only possible political goal for us; something radically different from the vague and confusing talk of Dominion Status.”<sup>6</sup> In Madras, Nehru spearheaded the passage of the Congress’ first resolution demanding complete independence from the British Empire. Although he presented a longer and more complex statement on independence to the Subjects Committee of the INC, the final resolution was concise and simple: “This Congress declares the goal of the Indian people

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<sup>2</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 175.

<sup>3</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 175.

<sup>4</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 175.

<sup>5</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 175.

<sup>6</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 175.

to be complete national independence.”<sup>7</sup> But when he spoke before the open sessions, he took the liberty to expand on the specificity underpinning the intent of the resolution. Complete independence, according to Nehru, meant, “control of the defense forces of the country...control over the financial and economic policy...control of the relations with foreign countries.”<sup>8</sup> The resolution reflected the his perceived necessity for India to develop in relation to other countries in the international world and not in relation to the metropole and imperial community.

His other resolutions, too, sought to crystallize connections between the INC and the anti-imperialist international world. First, Nehru presented a resolution affirming the formal association of the INC to the LAI. The next resolution echoed Nehru’s sentiment expressed at Brussels on cooperation and solidarity between Indian and Chinese nationalists. “The Congress has noted with humiliation and deep resentment that Indian troops have again been used by the British Government to further their imperialistic designs in China and to hinder and prevent the people of China from gaining their freedom.”<sup>9</sup> The Congress demanded the immediate withdrawal of Indian troops and recognized the Chinese as “comrades of the Indian people in their joint struggle against imperialism.”<sup>10</sup> The resolution also applied this statement to other British colonies, as well as Mesopotamia and Persia where Indian soldiers and police enforcement were

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<sup>7</sup> “Indian National Congress: Resolutions Passed by the Indian National Congress at its 42<sup>nd</sup> session held in Madras on December 26, 27 and 28, 1927,” Published by the Under Secretary of the All India Congress Committee, March 1928, File 4-1927, AICC Papers.

<sup>8</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, “The Resolution on Independence,” in *SWJN*, vol. 3, 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> INC, “Resolutions,” March 1928.

<sup>10</sup> INC, “Resolutions,” March 1928.

stationed by British mandate. His final resolution foreshadowed the dangers of another world war, one that the British would need Indian resources and manpower again.<sup>11</sup> It resolved that, “in the event of the British Government embarking on any warlike adventure and endeavoring to exploit India in it for the furtherance of their imperialist aims, it will be the duty of the people of India to refuse to take any part in such endeavor to cooperate with them in any way whatsoever.”<sup>12</sup> The resolutions collectively sought to embed in the INC mission a deeper engagement and dialogue with the international anti-imperialist world. Nehru even invited Madame Sun Yat-Sen to come to Madras for the INC sessions, but the British refused to endorse her visa application.

The political situation in India on the eve of the Madras sessions was ripe for change. In November 1927, the conservative government in Britain announced the creation of a Royal Commission to visit India and determine the fitness of the colony for self-rule. The Simon Commission, as it came to be named after its lead member Sir John Simon, neglected to invite a single Indian to participate on the committee. Outrage and resentment were widespread among the Indian National Congress members. When the Simon Commission arrived in India in February 1928, the all-white committee encountered angry protesters wielding black flags and calling out “Go Back Simon!”<sup>13</sup> Mobilization against the Simon Commission became a catalyst in resolving the political

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<sup>11</sup> In the 1920s, much talk in Soviet Russia focused on the “war scare.” It reflected a grave concern that Britain, a historical rival of Russia, would attack the Soviet Union to protect its capitalist and imperialist interests. There is some merit to this fear. The U.S. and Britain aided the counter-revolutionary forces in Russia during the Civil War. See Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1997), 70-71.

<sup>12</sup> INC, “Resolutions,” March 1928.

<sup>13</sup> Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence* (New Delhi: Viking Press, 1989).

stalemate within the INC between Swarajists and Gandhian no-changers that had characterized the period between 1922 and 1927. The commission also persuaded many Congressmen to reconsider the likelihood or desirability of staying within the empire. If Indians were not qualified to determine constitutional reforms for greater self-rule, than the commission recommendations were not likely to offer much in the way of substantive reforms.

For Nehru, however, the passage of an independence resolution involved more than a hostile reaction to the Simon Commission, but rather a paradigmatic shift in thinking about Indian nationalism and its relation to the world. Indeed, the Nehru of the late 1920s took a more radical stance in relation to his fellow Congressmen, and he quickly emerged as a maverick within the INC. For some of his colleagues, Nehru's homecoming in Madras signaled an important and much-needed change in the Indian nationalist landscape, one that set Nehru apart as one of a few radical leftists and internationalists in the rather moderate INC milieu of the 1920s. Indulal Yagnik, editor of the Bombay-based *Hindustan*, recalled the Madras INC meeting in 1927 as "historic" because Nehru "having new idealism and ideals... became eager to lead the country on the path of revolution after his return to the country."<sup>14</sup> Yagnik expressed "confidence that Jawaharlal, sparkling with extraordinary luster in the nation's firmament would give a new light, to the country dimming its other stars."<sup>15</sup> Nehru in 1927 seemed to offer a new creed and alternative to the Gandhian politics that had failed to produce a lasting

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<sup>14</sup> Indulal Yagnik, *The Autobiography of Indulal Yagnik*, ed. and trans. from Gujarati to English by Devavrat N. Pathak, Howard Spodek, and John R. Wood (forthcoming) (New Delhi: Manohar, 2010). See vol. 2, Part II, 358.

<sup>15</sup> Indulal Yagnik, *Autobiography*, 358.



unity among nationalists in the aftermath of the Non-cooperation movement. Energized by his encounters and anti-imperialist work, Nehru was prepared to convert and lead his fellow Congressmen down a more radical and internationalist path.

Still, the easy passage at Madras of the resolution promoting independence was a symbolic gesture for the INC rather than the beginning of deeper and more profound changes Nehru sought for India. As 1928 progressed, it became clear to Nehru that the independence resolution meant much more to him than it did to others in the INC. Even worse, Nehru faced his greatest resistance from his father, Motilal Nehru, and his political mentor, Gandhi. The tensions between Nehru and both his father and Gandhi expose the core issue for Indian nationalism in the late 1920s. Should India aim for *swaraj* within the empire or outside of the empire? Of course Jawaharlal committed to the latter, but much of the INC including Motilal and Gandhi adhered to the former. These dual oppositions revealed both the contested terrain of Indian nationalism in 1927, and the resistance Jawaharlal faced in delivering the international-national message to his Indian colleagues. Yet, the tensions also demonstrate the limits of Nehru's willingness to challenge his personal and professional allies – Motilal and Gandhi- as well as the overall consensus of the Congress. Nehru placed an unwavering faith in the Congress as the only vehicle capable of uniting an all-India anti-imperialist front and consequently connecting India to the international world.

As Nehru celebrated the passage of the independence resolution at the Madras Congress sessions, his father presented a very different picture of the INC to the League against Imperialism at its first General Council (GC) meeting in Brussels in December

1927. Originally, the League secretariat scheduled the GC meeting early enough for Jawaharlal to attend, but a last minute postponement requested by other members pushed it beyond his European stay. Jawaharlal sailed for India three days ahead of the meeting. It was a great disappointment for him, but he found solace in the fact that his father agreed to attend in his place. The meeting was not as large as the Brussels Congress, but still hosted representatives from India, China, Egypt, Indonesia, Korea, Indo-China, Palestine, Persia, Syria, Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, Holland, Belgium, France, Germany, Britain, Japan, the United States, and South African black and white delegations.

In an ironic twist, the younger Nehru was piloting the independence resolution in Madras at the same time the elder Nehru was convincing the League GC in Brussels that the Indian Congress program did not seek independence as its goal. To be sure, Motilal's speeches at the GC undermined Jawaharlal's presentation of the INC as a committed anti-imperialist organization. The Indian Congress, according to Motilal, was a forum for both, "those who wish to work for freedom and independence within the British Empire and ... those who wish to work for freedom and independence without the British Empire."<sup>16</sup> However, the INC members seeking independence from the empire were in a minority. Motilal argued, "Mr. Gandhi says that when we say 'swaraj' and independence for India it means independence with the British Empire, if possible and without the British Empire if necessary... What matters is freedom."<sup>17</sup> Although Motilal did not

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<sup>16</sup> The most comprehensive collection of speeches from the General Council meeting can be found in the Comintern Papers. For Motilal Nehru's speech, see 542/2/14/15-20, CI Papers.

<sup>17</sup> Motilal Nehru, General Council Meeting, CI Papers.

openly articulate his personal commitment to either the imperial (within empire) or the international (outside empire) frameworks for independence, it was clear that he meant to subvert any assumptions within the League that the INC had stood for independence and secession from the British Empire.

Motilal's statements appalled many of his fellow Indian colleagues at the GC. Chatto found his argument about India misleading: "It is very strange that Mr. Nehru says that the section which is for full self-determination of India is in the minority.... It is unfair to create the impression that there are no organizations which are for the absolute independence of India."<sup>18</sup> Like Jawaharlal, Chatto was optimistic that it would soon be clear to Indians across the subcontinent that independence from the British Empire would become the only logical outcome for India. Chatto already established contact with other organizations like the Workers and Peasants Party (WPP) in Bombay and Bengal, which were communist organizations that most definitely sought independence from the imperialist and capitalist control of the British. But Chatto and the other Indian speaker, Shapurji Saklatvala, also expressed concern that Motilal and the INC might betray the Indian workers and peasants as the KMT had in China. But the betrayal would not be in a violent assault. Motilal's more moderate appraisal of the INC did not alleviate their concerns. Gracious under pressure, Motilal reminded Chatto and Saklatvala: "I am here on the assurance of several people that one need not be a communist to join the League and that all the members were not communists."<sup>19</sup> Non-communists at the meeting

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<sup>18</sup> Chattopadyaya statement at General Council Meeting, 542/1/14/11, CI Papers.

<sup>19</sup> Motilal Nehru at General Council, 542/1/14/7, CI Papers.

expressed a more sympathetic view of Motilal and the INC position. Baldwin even wrote to Jawaharlal, “Your father made an excellent impression with a quiet and uncompromising address, reinforced by his personal charm. Of course Chatto and Saklatvala got a little extreme, but the honors all went to him.”<sup>20</sup> Edo Fimmen, another one of Jawaharlal’s close comrades from the Brussels Congress, reassured Motilal on behalf of the League that members had only, “feelings of sympathy, of brotherhood, of solidarity” with India.<sup>21</sup>

Motilal may have tarnished the INC’s position somewhat in the League, but this paled in comparison to Gandhi’s highly publicized criticism of the Madras independence resolution before the ink on the document had even dried. Not more than a week after the Madras INC wrapped up, Gandhi sent a letter to Nehru to express his displeasure in the resolutions passed in the annual session, which he thought were “careless.”<sup>22</sup> Gandhi’s letter instigated a highly contentious exchange of private letters and published statements between him and Nehru over the merits of the independence resolution. The 1928 schism reflected a fundamental difference between the framing of the Indian national movement in relation to the competing models of imperially and internationally structured worlds. Nehru spoke the language of belonging to an international community and the dynamic engagement between India and the anti-imperialist world. Gandhi’s critique of Nehru was

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<sup>20</sup> Baldwin (Paris) to Nehru (Allahabad), 12 December 1927, Box 8, Folder 2, Baldwin Papers.

<sup>21</sup> Fimmen Statement at General Council Meeting, 542/1/14/10, CI Papers.

<sup>22</sup> Gandhi to Nehru, 4 January 1928, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Electronic Book), New Delhi, Publications Division Government of India, 1999, vol. 41, 79-80. (Hereafter cited as *CWMG*).

grounded in the imperial framework, and his arguments stressed India as a model that Britain and the world could study and emulate.

Gandhi presented his position on Nehru's resolutions in his publication *Young India* in an article entitled, "Independence v. Swaraj."<sup>23</sup> Here, he laid out three arguments against independence. First, he denounced paper resolutions without a plan for action. Second, Gandhi thought it inappropriate to choose an English rather than Hindi term to define the goals for the INC.<sup>24</sup> Third and more important here, Gandhi argued that *swaraj* meant freedom from the British yoke, but through a means of "conversion, not coercion; it is self-suffering, not the suffering of the tyrant."<sup>25</sup> In other words, if Indians practiced non-violence and truth, then Britain would be convinced to follow the Gandhian path and relinquish its empire. Gandhi's philosophy was one of India teaching and converting the world. Unlike Nehru, Gandhi had little interest in lessons and education from other parts of the anti-imperialist world. He explained, and I quote liberally:

Through the deliverance of India, I seek to deliver the so-called weaker races of the earth from the crushing heels of Western exploitation in which England is the greatest partner. If India converts, as it can convert, Englishmen, it can become the predominant partner in a world commonwealth of which England can have the privilege of becoming a partner if she chooses. India has the right, if she only knew, of becoming the predominant partner by reason of her numbers, geographical position and culture inherited for the ages. This is big talk ... for a fallen India to aspire to move the world and protect weaker races is seemingly an impertinence.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mohandas Gandhi, "Independence v. Swaraj," *Young India*, 12 January 1928, in *CWMG*, vol. 41, 104-107.

<sup>24</sup> Nehru later changed his demand to *purna swaraj* rather than the English term 'complete independence.' This is largely because of this linguistic criticism.

<sup>25</sup> Gandhi, "Independence v. Swaraj," *CWMG*, vol.41, 106.

<sup>26</sup> Gandhi, "Independence v. Swaraj," *CWMG*, vol.41,106.

Gandhi intended for India to “convert” those within a “world commonwealth,” while also inverting the power dynamics of such a community to reflect parity or even more power for India as exemplary in relation to other countries and regions of the world.

For Nehru, the internationalist framework informed the path the INC should take, one that should seek national sovereignty and membership in an international community of nations. He wrote to Gandhi that this belief, ingrained from his experiences in Brussels and through the League, meant “a very great deal” for him and he attached “more importance to it than to almost anything else.”<sup>27</sup> Nehru added in a letter to Gandhi that the idea of Dominion Status “suffocates and strangles me.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Nehru argued to Gandhi that India had much to learn from other countries. From Egypt, it was clear that nominal independence within the empire did not bring greater freedom. From Soviet Russia, Nehru argued that India could learn new and alternative means to deal with poverty and inequality. He argued that Gandhi’s constructive programs and rural uplift “are well and fine, but none of them strike at the core reasons why such conditions existed.”<sup>29</sup> For Nehru, it was obvious that British imperialists were at the root of the problem, but so were Indian landowners and capitalists. He wrote to Gandhi that: “you do not say a word against the semi-feudal zaminidari system which prevails in a great part of

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<sup>27</sup> Nehru to Gandhi, 11 January 1928, *SWJN*, vol. 3, 11.

<sup>28</sup> Nehru to Gandhi, January 11, 1928. Reprinted in *SWJN*, vol. 3, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Nehru to Gandhi, *SWJN*, vol. 3, 12.

India or against the capitalist exploitation of both the workers and the consumers.”<sup>30</sup>

Nehru even likened Gandhi’s writings about the United States to the same genre that produced Katherine Mayo’s “drain inspector’s report” on India.<sup>31</sup> Nehru writes, “You misjudge greatly I think the civilization of the West and attach too great an importance to its many failings.”<sup>32</sup>

In several press statements, Nehru defended his independence resolution by deploying an attack on the notion of Dominion Status. Once again, he reminded his audience that freedom within the empire for countries like Egypt was hollow and a façade. “There can be no freedom of any kind with a foreign army occupying India as it does in Egypt, controlling and suppressing the nation’s activities.”<sup>33</sup> According to Nehru, complete independence meant a new kind of connection with Britain and the world. It “necessarily involved severance of the British connection as it exists, but it does not mean that there should be no alliance between India and England or any other country.”<sup>34</sup> Rather, independence hinged on India’s freedom to choose the conditions and terms of its connections with Britain and countries around the world. Independence also meant that

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<sup>30</sup> Nehru to Gandhi, *SWJN*, vol. 3, 15.

<sup>31</sup> Nehru to Gandhi, *SWJN*, vol. 3, 14. Gandhi famously called a book written by an American woman, Katherine Mayo, a “drain inspectors report.” In general, Indians were outraged by the one-sided perspective of Mayo’s pro-British Empire critique of Indian society. See Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1927). For a book on the Indian responses to this report, including Gandhi’s criticism that it was a drain inspector’s report on India, see Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Nehru to Gandhi, *SWJN*, vol. 3, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Nehru, “Statement to the Press” *Tribune*, 12 January 1928, *SWJN*, vol.3, 16.

<sup>34</sup> Nehru, “Statement to Press,” *SWJN*, vol. 3, 16.

India would no longer collaborate with the imperial ambitions of Britain in other colonies, mandates, and semi-dependent countries.

On January 27, Nehru published another statement in the *Tribune* to the effect that no conflict existed between *swaraj* and independence.<sup>35</sup> But this statement appealed to Indian readers to consider the implications of Dominion Status more thoroughly. Nehru argued, “India’s willing association with the British group can only mean that we support reaction and war and the suppression of struggling peoples and nations.”<sup>36</sup> Based on his observations in Europe, Nehru reminded readers that the existing dominions, like Canada and Australia, were no longer gravitating to the imperial center, and any future “world crisis is exceedingly likely to result in the splitting up of the British group of nations.”<sup>37</sup> Aside from the fragile and weakened state of the British Empire, Nehru also doubted whether India could ever be an equal member of the “British group of nations.” He added that it was possible for India “to become a nominal member of the group with a semblance of political power but without an effective voice in important matters of domestic and foreign policy, financially a thrall of London, and being made to play the imperialist game for the benefit of England. This is something very far from *Swaraj*.”<sup>38</sup> And finally, Nehru argued that India had a responsibility to the international anti-imperialist struggle, one that required complete independence from empire. Drawing

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<sup>35</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, “Statement on the Independence Resolution,” 27 January 1928, *SWJN*, vol. .3, 20-22.

<sup>36</sup> Nehru, “Statement,” *SWJN*, vol. 3, 21.

<sup>37</sup> Nehru, “Statement,” *SWJN*, vol. 3, 22.

<sup>38</sup> Nehru, “Statement,” *SWJN*, vol. 3, 22.



once again on the world context and anti-imperialists beyond Indian shores, Nehru concluded, “If India has a message to give to the world it is clear that she can do so more effectively as an independent country than as a member of the British group. Even England will listen to her more attentively if this message comes from a free and separate country than if it is accompanied with economic friction and domestic squabbles which must occur if we are tied to her.”<sup>39</sup>

For all of his arguments and press statements about complete independence, Nehru ultimately sought rapprochement and compromise with Gandhi. As early as February 1928, Nehru went to Gandhi’s ashram to hammer out a truce for the sake of INC unity. Gandhi pressured him to back away from his radical stance on complete independence temporarily. Gandhi’s political style lent itself to what David Hardiman has called the “Gandhian Dialogic.” Hardiman rightly argues that Gandhi strove to keep a wide range of dialogues open with his political opponents as a means of finding a common ground that would alter and enrich a general understanding and knowledge of the human condition and the world.<sup>40</sup> He was a master of wooing political opponents into some form of agreement. He did so with Nehru’s father in 1924 when Gandhi convinced Motilal and the Swarajists to rejoin the INC. He also won Jawaharlal Nehru over with his personal overtures in the midst of the 1928 schism: “I felt a kind of safety that, in view of the relations between you and me, my writings would be taken in the spirit in which they were written... I need hardly assure you that in all I have written I had nothing personal

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<sup>39</sup> Nehru, “Statement,” *SWJN*, vol. 3, 22.

<sup>40</sup> See Introduction to David Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2003). Judith Brown also studies Gandhi’s ability to win over political adversaries through personal appeal. See her *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

against you.”<sup>41</sup> For Gandhi, through a hashing out of their differences, a common ground could be found and the INC would be better for the dialogue and debate produced out of the Gandhi and Nehru schism.

Why did Nehru compromise with Gandhi on the key issue of independence in an international world? His decisions in 1928 have pushed some contemporaries and later historians to criticize Nehru for being a rhetorical radical. Historian Benjamin Zachariah argues that Nehru’s “clearest statements were accompanied by his most compromising and ineffectual political actions.”<sup>42</sup> I stress two things that tell us more about Nehru as a person in this moment. First, Nehru was a strategic politician and an Indian National Congress leader. For Nehru, the INC was the preeminent – indeed only possible – institution capable of linking local anti-imperialist forces in India, and also linking India to the international world. He *could not* envision national and international anti-imperialism without the Indian National Congress as the main vehicle to link locality, province, nation and world. Within the Congress, Nehru sought to convert his father, Gandhi, and the INC more generally, to his way of thinking about Indian nationalism in an international anti-imperialist world. He even admitted that he signed on as the Congress general secretary as a means “to prevent... the swing back to Moderation and to hold on to the Independence objective.”<sup>43</sup> From 1927 onward, Nehru consistently worked within the INC to push forward a united position for independence in line with the international anti-imperialists of the League.

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<sup>41</sup> Gandhi to Nehru, 17 January 1928, *CWMG*, vol. 41, 120-121.

<sup>42</sup> Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru*.

<sup>43</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 177.

Second, Nehru's commitment to INC consensus reveals the importance of his personal ties and dependence upon the Congress leadership, especially Gandhi and, of course, his father. Nehru owed much of his own political clout within India to his father and Gandhi, and for this practical reason he would not break with them publicly. To be sure, Nehru depended on his father and Gandhi for guidance and mentorship despite their differences in nationalist and internationalist politics. In 1928, Nehru had been willing to challenge his father and father-like figure (*Bapu*, as Gandhi was called) even in public forums and debates, a drastic departure from his days as a dutiful son practicing law in Allahabad. Nevertheless, he confined these tensions with Gandhi and Motilal to debate rather than outright rupture or dissent.

Nehru's political and personal obligations to the INC often trapped and limited his more radical ideas and internationalist designs, a problem he would encounter repeatedly in the late 1920s and 1930s. It is one that Nehru seemed to resolve. He failed to see the ambivalence in his ideas about the INC in 1928. While he maintained an unwavering loyalty to the INC as the only anti-imperialist vehicle capable of uniting India, Nehru's more radical version of anti-imperialism was vastly different than others at the helm of the Congress. Yet as a motivated and rising politician, he chose to overlook these issues and press his nationalist colleagues to join him in his more radical critique of the British Empire and global imperialism.

#### 4.2 Connections and Networks across the Anti-Imperial World

Throughout 1928 and early 1929 Nehru maintained an active profile in the League through a rigorous correspondence campaign. All of his activities sought to strengthen the highly centralized institutional network of the League against Imperialism with its headquarters in Berlin.<sup>44</sup> By 1928 the League's permanent secretariat, an institutional center Nehru had helped create, had become a hub of intellectual and political traffic that moved in and out of Berlin to its individual and organizational members across the anti-imperialist world. When Nehru wrote directly to Leaguers like Baldwin and Bridgeman, he sought their help in garnering greater support and cooperation in the service of the League. The few messages that made their way to Nehru from other colonies, and vice versa, were also filtered through Berlin. First, the communication channels between India and Europe were easier to negotiate than cross-colonial correspondence. The anxious intelligence community stopped any letters coming to India from abroad, but especially those from places outside the metropole. It was also a testament to a moment in the history when international institutions were viewed as the answer to world problems.<sup>45</sup> One of the most critical aspects of the 1920s international world had been the institutional meeting spaces and networks that linked the state and non-state actors across the globe. Nehru's independent India meant a faith in international institutionalism – like the League – and the freedom to join it.

Aside from Baldwin in the United States and Bridgeman in Britain, most of Nehru's anti-imperialist connections flowed between India and the League against

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<sup>44</sup> The permanent headquarters moved from Paris to Berlin in 1928 where it would remain until 1933.

<sup>45</sup> We have discussed this above in the introduction, especially in reference to the League of Nations, Communist International, and other groups.

Imperialism secretariat in Berlin. In January, Chatto took over the reins of the headquarters after the executive council called for resignations from the former secretaries for their failures to carry out effectively the work of the League. Chatto had a supreme ability to organize administrative and propaganda hubs. He had done so in other capacities in London, Stockholm, and Berlin, and he commanded several languages including English, French, German, Swedish, Russian, and Bengali. With Chatto at the helm, the League secretariat once again relocated to Berlin. Under his leadership, the League secretariat entered a new phase of professionalism. Chatto produced with regularity weekly bulletins, monthly press services, and a quarterly journal, *The Anti-Imperialist Review*. His updates and information were more expeditious and accurate. Nehru recognized the shift in the quality and consistency of the League work when he wrote to Baldwin in early May 1928: “The Berlin office of the League has been sending me quite a large number of letters and it would appear at least that something is being done.”<sup>46</sup>

For Nehru, Chatto was a highly desirable ally as an anti-imperialist and an Indian nationalist. Their correspondence in 1928 reflected their friendship.<sup>47</sup> Professionally, the two shared a commitment to an independent India free of the British Empire, as well as a strong connection between India and the League. The task of greatest importance to Chatto and Nehru had been the integration into the League of other noteworthy organizations in India like the trade unions, All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC),

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<sup>46</sup> Nehru to Baldwin, 14 May 1928, *SWJN*, vol. 3, 130.

<sup>47</sup> For an example of the personal dimension of relationship, see Nehru to Chatto, 26 June 1928, *SWJN*, vol.3, 133.

Hindustani Seva Dal; Sikh League; Kirti Kisan Sabha; and the Workers and Peasants Party (WPP) of Bombay, Bengal and Madras.<sup>48</sup> To Mangal Singh of the Sikh League, Nehru wrote: “I feel that it is very desirable for our organizations to associate themselves with international bodies like the League against Imperialism. This helps the anti-imperialist cause and at the same time broadens our own outlook.”<sup>49</sup> By April, Chatto and Nehru had secured association from major labor unions like the Bombay Mill Workers Union, Bombay Engineering Workers Union, and the Bombay Port Trust Railwaymen’s Union.<sup>50</sup>

Nehru and Chatto were particularly keen to share news from other parts of the anti-imperialist world. Chatto relayed updates about the addition of members to the League from Iraq in April 1929.<sup>51</sup> He added, “You personally enjoy a very considerable reputation in Irak, as you will have seen from the letter published in the ‘Mahratt’ from its Baghdad correspondent.”<sup>52</sup> Chatto also discussed the inroads the League made in Egypt when the longstanding member, Mohamed Ramadan Bey of the Egyptian Nationalist Party was joined by members of the Wafd Party in supporting it.<sup>53</sup> Both

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<sup>48</sup> I am indebted to the works of two scholars who delivered as yet unpublished papers at the Temple University Workshop, “India and the World” on October 21, 2009. On the debate within AITUC on international affiliations, Carolien Stolte, “‘To draw closer together the exploited Workers of the East’: Indian trade unionism and the competition for Asia, 1920-1937.” For the Punjabi Left and Internationalism, Ali Raza, “Going Beyond the Nation – The Case of the Punjabi Left.”

<sup>49</sup> Nehru to Mangal Singh, 10 July 1928. *SWJN*, vol. 3, 136.

<sup>50</sup> Jhabvala (Bombay) to Chatto (Berlin), 19 April 1928, File 11, LAI Papers.

<sup>51</sup> Chatto to Nehru, 3 April 1929, File 6, LAI Papers.

<sup>52</sup> Chatto to Nehru dated April 3, 1929, File 6, LAI Papers.

<sup>53</sup> The Wafd Party formed in 1920 to go to the League of Nations and lobby for Egyptian independence. It was the most popular party during the interwar period, particularly under its well-liked

Egyptian parties “have come to realize that the more the nationalist movements mean business, the more they must cooperate with the world’s anti-imperialist forces.”<sup>54</sup> The Wafd Party’s biggest challenge to cooperation with the League had been the desire of many to challenge Britain by pitting other imperial powers against the largest empire-state. But Chatto thought the League had convinced Wafd leaders “that imperialisms hang together and must be hanged together.”<sup>55</sup> Chatto also reported that the Indonesian nationalist papers had given such favorable praise to the League that its anti-imperial literature had been translated into Malay and distributed widely. According to an optimistic Chatto, the League shall soon “have the satisfaction of recording the affiliation of all national movements from Morocco to Indonesia.”<sup>56</sup>

Nehru depended on the League for his connections to the international anti-imperialist world and especially his intercolonial contacts and communications. Direct intercolonial networks were much slower to develop for several practical reasons. Travel and postal routes flowed with greater consistency and frequency between India and Europe. Of course, the Government of India intercepted a great deal of correspondence, and colonial intelligence was especially suspicious of letters between India and countries like China, Egypt or even Soviet Russia. At the time, the Indian Political Intelligence community tracked with great vigor the movement of literature and letters that linked

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leader, Saad Zaghloul. See Selma Botman, *Egypt From Independence to Revolution, 1919-1952* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991).

<sup>54</sup> Chatto to Nehru, 3 April 1929, File 6, LAI Papers.

<sup>55</sup> Chatto to Nehru, 9 April 1929, File 1-1929, AICC Papers.

<sup>56</sup> Chatto to Nehru, 3 April 1929, File 6, LAI Papers.

India to the world, and most letters Nehru received from the League were opened first by government agents before eventually making their way to him. Nevertheless, Nehru communicated solidarity and comradeship with other colonies through the League networks. Of the imprisonment of Mohamed Hatta, the Indonesian member of the League, Nehru wrote Berlin: "I am anxiously awaiting the decision in Mohammed Hatta's case. Send my love to him if you are writing to him."<sup>57</sup>

League propaganda circulation was a powerful avenue for Nehru to stay in contact with the broader international world of anti-imperialism in colonies and elsewhere. Chatto launched the League's more polished and official publication, *The Anti-Imperial Review*, in July 1928. While earlier bulletins and newsletters provided snippets of information on anti-imperial events and news, the quarterly journal provided a well-circulated forum for article-length discussions on imperialism and resistance. The first volume opened with a foreword from the League's newly elected chairman, James Maxton. He reminded his audience of the link between the struggles of the working class and the colonized: "Life under capitalism is bad enough for the Working Class in the highly developed industrial countries of Europe, but it is infinitely worse for the subject peoples, and particularly the coloured races, subjected as they are, to the double tyranny of foreign government and foreign capitalism." The League, Maxton argued, was the first ever organization to offer a "common ground" to "pursue in the common task of emancipation." The institution contacted "every part of the world" to collect information

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<sup>57</sup> Nehru to Liau Hansin (Berlin Office of the LAI), 18 April 1928, *SWJN*, Vol.3, 128-129.



about the conditions in the colonies and made such vital reports available for educating the masses of the world.<sup>58</sup>

Nehru applauded the first volume of the *Anti-Imperialist Review* in a letter to Chatto. “I liked it. I hope you will be able to continue and maintain a high standard.”<sup>59</sup> Nehru read with delight the opening article by Willi Muenzenberg, “From Demonstration to Organization,” which traced the history of the League against Imperialism. He argued that the League members must take the next step by developing and connecting the local movements for social and political emancipation to the League’s national, regional, and international layers of mobilization. He appeals to his audience: “The sufferings of hundreds of millions of oppressed human beings, the desperate struggle of whole races and peoples, demand urgent help and support! Only large, strong, active and efficient organizations can bring them this help. Therefore- ALL HANDS ON BOARD! HELP US TO DEVELOP THE DEMONSTRATION INTO AN ORGANIZATION.”<sup>60</sup> [His caps.]

The *Review* also informed the anti-imperial world about India. Muenzenberg’s important article shared with readers the inroads Nehru had made in the internationalization of Indian nationalism. Muenzenberg underscored the importance of Nehru’s work in associating the INC to the League and in facilitating contact with the AITUC and WPP. As mentioned earlier, AITUC was the main trade union federation in

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<sup>58</sup> *Anti-Imperial Review* 1, no. 1 (July 1928), File 37, LAI Papers.

<sup>59</sup> *Anti-Imperial Review*, July 1928, LAI Papers.

<sup>60</sup> Willi Muenzenberg, ““From Demonstration to Organization,” *Anti-Imperial Review*, July 1928, LAI Papers.

India, while the WPP was a communist-inspired peasant and workers association with branches in Bombay, Bengal, and the U.P. Muenzenberg urged his Indian friends to consolidate the anti-imperialist forces in the INC, AITUC, and WPP into a single movement against British rule, linking the most revolutionary forces in India to each other and to the broader anti-imperialist front of the League. Other articles informed Nehru and Indian readers of the events unfolding in China, Indonesia, Egypt, Abyssinia, and the Belgian Congo.<sup>61</sup> Saklatvala contributed an article on the class dynamics of imperialism in India. Chatto requested a contribution to the review from Nehru, who later sent an article to Berlin for the third installment.

The League's information and propaganda not only offered a critical forum for Nehru to imagine himself and India as part of a broader geography of anti-imperialism, it also provided rich material for recirculation in the Indian press. Despite British efforts to keep seditious literature out of India, the League bulletins and reviews were smuggled into the subcontinent and circulated widely to national and regional publications like the *Forward*, the *Bombay Chronicle*, the *Hindu*, and the *Hindustan Times*. Nehru also went to great lengths in 1928 to ensure that the League's message spread throughout the INC's local, provincial and national communication channels. He forwarded ideas and information through the Congress bulletins in a rigorous campaign to link local anti-colonial resistance to international anti-imperialism.

One of Nehru's most adventuresome projects aiming to bring the INC closer inline with international anti-imperialism was the Independence for India League. It

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<sup>61</sup> The Belgian colonies were restricted from discussions at the Brussels Congress. However, the League against Imperialism freely criticized Belgian imperialism.

emerged out of Nehru's frustration with the proposed constitutional reforms in the Nehru Report, named after Motilal not Jawaharlal. The report was a set of constitutional reforms determined by an Indian All-Parties coalition in response to whatever recommendations might be handed down by the Simon Commission. The INC decided in Madras that the INC, Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha, and other political parties would meet at an All-Parties Convention to determine a new constitution for India. The maneuver would prove to the British that Indians were entirely capable of self-government. The (Motilal) Nehru Report tackled many domestic concerns, for example the issue of religious and communal tensions, for which it proposed a plan for reserved seats for Muslim minorities in the central government and the provinces where Hindus form a majority.<sup>62</sup> It also called for universal adult suffrage, a radical decision in 1928 considering universal suffrage had only been extended to women over age twenty-one in Britain a month earlier with the enactment into law of the Equal Franchise Act. But on its international agenda, the report also settled for Dominion Status within the British Empire, and Jawaharlal found himself in stark opposition to this dramatic reversal of his Madras resolution.

The report forced Nehru into a painful and difficult position, one in which he openly defied a document his father authored and supported wholeheartedly. At the unveiling of the Nehru Report in Lucknow in August 1928, Motilal stood behind Dominion Status while his son withdrew support from it. Instead, Jawaharlal spoke out against it and decided to establish an Independence League for others who could not

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<sup>62</sup> Nehru Report, reprinted in *Selected works of Motilal Nehru*, ed. by Ravinder Kumar, D. N. Panigrahi, and H. D. Sharma, vol. 6 (Vikas: New Delhi: 1982).

longer accept Dominion Status as a goal for India. Nehru recounted in his autobiography a rather painful memory of conflict with his father over the report: “We did not argue about the matter much, but there was a definite feeling of mental conflict between us, an attempt to pull different ways...both of us were unhappy about it.”<sup>63</sup>

Nevertheless, Nehru did not remain silent in Lucknow and stood in opposition to many of his fellow Congressmen, and even his father, to argue for independence for India. His speech drew heavily upon his international geography of anti-imperialism to criticize Dominion Status. Supporters of the Nehru Report and Dominion Status, according to Nehru, “embody an ideology of a past age utterly out of touch with facts and realities of today... It seems to me that we are drifting back from the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the ways and methods of the 19<sup>th</sup>.”<sup>64</sup> Nehru argued that acceptance of Dominion Status will usher in an era when India will become a tool of imperialism deployed by the British and other dominions: “There are England and the self-governing dominions, exploiting India, parts of Africa, Malaya and other parts of the world. When we obtain Dominion Status, are we going to get promotion from the exploited part to that of the exploiting? Are we going to assist England and the other Dominions in exploiting Egypt and Africa?”<sup>65</sup> At the conclusion of the speech, Nehru respectfully withdrew his support for the Nehru Report and presented a statement signed by several others of a small community of leftists who also refused to accept Dominion Status as the constitutional goal for India.

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<sup>63</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 198.

<sup>64</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speech at the All Parties Conference in Lucknow, 19 August 1928. vol. 3, *SWJN*, 57.

<sup>65</sup> Nehru, Speech, *SWJN*, vol. 3, 57.

The signatories of the statement formed the membership basis of Nehru's Independence League, a pressure group that remained within the Congress fold while also pushing for the INC to accept as its goal independence.

Nehru emerged in Lucknow as a clear leader of a small but growing leftist faction of the Indian National Congress who welcomed his internationalist-inspired Independence League. Nehru was not the only voice within the Congress espousing the ideas of international anti-imperialism and socialism. Punjabi and Bengali leftists, most notably Subhas Chandra Bose of Calcutta, were inclined toward Nehru's more radicalized ideas about India and its place in the world. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Nehru and Bose emerged as luminaries among the more radical elements of Indian politics – namely the Independence League, but also the youth movements, workers and peasants parties, and trade unions. Both traveled the Indian countryside and cities in 1928 and 1929 to rally support for complete independence and socialist reform.<sup>66</sup> Certainly, others outside the Indian National Congress had more radical and internationalist ideas about India. The well-documented history of M.N. Roy serves as a powerful example of the Indian exile alignment with international communism. Roy worked with Moscow to develop a radical and revolutionary policy that was hostile to the Indian National Congress. As an exile, Roy also worked outside the subcontinent.<sup>67</sup> Others in India, too, formed the Communist Party of India in 1925 to tackle the issues of socialist reform and international connections with the Soviet Union. But Nehru and Bose, in the late 1920s,

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<sup>66</sup> See “The Rise of the Left-Wing” in Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence* (Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989); and Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

<sup>67</sup> For a transnational perspective of M.N. Roy, see Kris Manjapra, *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (London: Routledge, 2010).

worked together in the Congress to pull the moderate and rightwing elements of the INC toward a more leftist and internationalist orientation. Both shared the political strategy to work within the INC – as Congress politicians - to radicalize and internationalize it.

Nehru also considered the Independence League to be the cornerstone of connections between India and the League against Imperialism. Nehru wrote to Chatto that the Indian League would be “a meeting ground for anti-imperial activities,” and he drafted into the Independence League constitution its association to the LAI.<sup>68</sup> The second meeting of the Independence League met in Delhi in November 1928 where office holders were elected: Srinivasa Iyengar (President), Shiva Prasad Gupta (Treasurer), Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose (Secretaries). This was Nehru’s brainchild, and the headquarters was established near his home in Allahabad, UP. The conveners decided on the production of a weekly newspaper and another meeting in tandem with the INC annual session in Calcutta later that year. The push for an Independence League newspaper, in fact, had been one of several suggestions from Chatto who thought Nehru should organize a more efficient and reliable outlet for the weekly press service statements he had been sending from Berlin.<sup>69</sup> Chatto hoped Nehru’s Independence League might become the national branch in India of the LAI. He also encouraged Nehru to invite more than INC members and especially the trade unionists and WPP members. It is no surprise, then, that out of the Delhi sessions, too, the Independence League broadened its vision of independence to include not only an opposition to Dominion

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<sup>68</sup> Nehru to Chatto, 3 October 1928, *SWJN*, vol. 3, 143.

<sup>69</sup> Chatto to Nehru, 3 October 1928, File 11, LAI Papers.

Status but also “the reconstruction of Indian society on a basis of social and economic equality.”<sup>70</sup> Nehru and Chatto were bringing together the Indian and international League in ways that would promote both the national struggle against the raj and the international social struggle of the “oppressed peoples of the world.”

Much to Nehru’s chagrin, the Independence League never gained momentum. For one thing, the initial group had not intended to break with the INC, but to pressure the Congress to accept nothing short of complete independence from Britain as outlined in the 1927 Madras resolution. Most members were reluctant to cooperate with others outside the INC fold, especially the communist WPP. Nehru and Bose tried to resign from their positions as co-secretaries of the INC on the basis that a conflict of interest existed between the Independence League and the Congress. But both men were persuaded to stay on. Nehru recalled rather disappointingly, “[H]ow easy it was to win me over to a withdrawal of my resignation.”<sup>71</sup> However, Nehru’s decision to create an Independence League proved that he was willing to challenge Gandhi, Motilal, and the INC on the issue of complete independence, and he demanded and received certain compromises from the INC leaders on the final draft of the Nehru Report. In December 1928, the INC took a middle ground stance between Dominion Status and independence by submitting an ultimatum to the government of India that demanded Dominion Status within a year or the Congress would call for complete independence and a civil disobedience campaign across the subcontinent. At first the ultimatum had been set at

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<sup>70</sup> Nehru, “Interview to the Press,” 16 November 1928, repr. in *The Searchlight* on 21 November 1928, repr. in *SWJN*, vol. 3, 76-78.

<sup>71</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 183.

two years, but Nehru won support within the INC to shorten the grace period to a year. The Government appeared unyielding to the ultimatum and the Congress declared independence as its goal in 1929, therefore rendering the Independence League unnecessary. According to Nehru, the INC drew “all the dynamic elements towards itself and the [Independence] League grew weaker. With the coming of the Civil Disobedience struggle in 1930, the League got merged into the Congress and disappeared.”<sup>72</sup>

Chatto and Nehru devised other schemes too. One project sought to revitalize the Berlin Indian Information Bureau. Chatto had developed this bureau in 1925 to disseminate propaganda for Indian independence throughout Continental Europe.<sup>73</sup> Nehru secured some INC funds for Chatto to reopen the bureau and develop additional programs designed to funnel Indian students to Berlin rather than London for their educational needs. In addition to Chatto, another Indian expatriate in Berlin, A.C.N. Nambiar, helped run the INC-funded information bureau.<sup>74</sup> The letters from Chatto in his personal capacity and as the secretary of the League or the Information Bureau expressed a willingness to coordinate Nehru’s work in India with the international anti-imperial community abroad. Indeed, Chatto reminded Nehru: “If you think that there is any

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<sup>72</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 194.

<sup>73</sup> See Nirode K. Barooah, *Chatto: The Life and Time of an Indian Anti-imperialist in Europe* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>74</sup> A.C.N. Nambiar was another Indian expatriate in Berlin at the time. He worked as a journalist, headed the INC sponsored Indian Bureau, and later moved to Prague until World War II. Nehru appointed him Indian ambassador to West Germany after independence.



special action we can undertake please let us know by letter or by wire and we shall do our very best to carry it through.”<sup>75</sup>

#### 4.3 The League against Imperialism comes to India

Connections between India and the international world moved in both directions, and Nehru not only reached outward through the League networks but also enticed members of the anti-imperial community to come to India. Nehru and Chatto made a number of attempts to arrange for LAI members to attend labour and nationalist meetings in India. This was no easy task given the heightened measures taken by the Government of India and the Foreign Office in London to ensure that undesirables from Europe could not gain access to an empire-wide passport endorsement. By 1928 colonial intelligence in London and Delhi had developed an extensive passport blacklist consisting of anyone with ties to League against Imperialism.<sup>76</sup> Madame Sun Yat-sen reapplied for a visa to go to India to speak at the INC sessions in 1928 only to be denied for two years consecutively.<sup>77</sup> Despite the passport blacklist, the League against Imperialism managed to sneak a single delegate into India to attend the AITUC, INC, and WPP annual meetings in November and December.

The League delegate, however, was not one of Nehru’s comrades from the Brussels Congress. Rather, he was an American communist named J. W. Johnstone.

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<sup>75</sup> Chatto to Nehru, 9 April 1929, File 1-1929, AICC Papers.

<sup>76</sup> For files on the Blacklist, League against Imperialism Files, Fiche 322, IPI Papers.

<sup>77</sup> Bridgeman, Maxton, Baldwin, Chattopadyaya, and Muenzenberg were also on the blacklist. A copy of the visa refusal of Madame Sun can be found in “Refusal of a passport to Mme. Sun Yat Sen,” League against Imperialism Files, Fiche 327, IPI Papers.

Johnstone was a newcomer to the League, and with his U.S. passport, he slipped under the watchful eye of the British authorities in India. There was some recognition in the intelligence files that a man by the name of “Johnson” might try to go to India on behalf of the League, but British agents never followed through on the lead until after the American landed in Bombay.<sup>78</sup> Johnstone came from Chicago where he played an instrumental role in the labor strikes that nearly shut down the city after World War I. Chatto characterized him as “an old fighter of the trade union movement.”<sup>79</sup> Johnstone knew very little about India, and he relied on talking points drafted by Clemens Palm Dutt, an Indian expatriate and communist in London who also belonged to the British national section of the League. Johnstone also carried a copy of the League’s *Anti-Imperialist Review* for reference.<sup>80</sup>

Nehru met Johnstone at his first All-Indian Trade Union Congress meeting in Jharia in December 1928. Nehru had embarked on a rigorous speaking campaign to promote independence, socialism and working class equality at trade unionist gatherings and strikes across India in 1928, but Jharia was his first encounter with All-India labor politics. Founded in 1920 to represent India in the International Labor Organization of the League of Nations, AITUC had grown steadily throughout the immediate postwar decade. It had also become a coveted prize for the competing international labor movements like the LSI and the Comintern. Chatto and the League, too, desired its full

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<sup>78</sup> “Report on the League against Imperialism,” League against Imperialism Files, Fiche 328, IPI Papers.

<sup>79</sup> Chatto to Nehru about Johnstone, 5 December 1928, File 5, LAI Papers.

<sup>80</sup> Copy of notes on India prepared for Johnstone, 542/1/26/65, CI Papers; Clemens Palme Dutt was an Indian expatriate in Britain and member of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

cooperation and association. But the moderates and radicals within AITUC were deeply divided over the relationship Indian labor should have with the internationals of the world.<sup>81</sup> Moderates oriented toward Geneva's ILO and the LSI, while radicals were inspired by the Comintern and its offshoots in Asia like the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Congress. AITUC debates over which international organizations to affiliate became a contentious issue, one that the federation could not find consensus. Nehru sympathized with the Comintern connection over the LSI, and more importantly his first priority was to secure the affiliation of AITUC to the LAI.<sup>82</sup>

From Nehru's point of view, the AITUC sessions were a great success because Johnstone represented the League and AITUC agreed to affiliate with it. The two outcomes were interrelated. Johnstone attended only one day of the AITUC sessions before the British authorities arrested him on his way back to his hotel. The decision for AITUC affiliation to the League was a symbolic measure of protest against the detainment of Johnstone; it was a temporary measure scheduled to expire after one year. It is noteworthy, then, that the League was the only international organization successfully to attain AITUC affiliation in the 1920s. Nevertheless, for Nehru, the affiliation was a clear step in the right direction. In addition, the Johnstone affair ignited a firestorm of protest in India, Europe and the United States. British authorities held Johnstone for a month before deporting him first to Europe and then the United States. In the months between the AITUC session and Johnstone's safe arrival in Europe, labor

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<sup>81</sup> For a history of AITUC see P.S. Gupta, *A Short History of the All India Trade Union Congress, 1920-1947* (New Delhi: AITUC Publication, 1980).

<sup>82</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 197.

leaders in Chicago took to the streets. The international League circulated similar protests and cabled both the British and U.S. governments for his immediate release.<sup>83</sup> Nehru deemed it “humiliating” that India could not host delegates from abroad.<sup>84</sup> To be sure, AITUC’s affiliation to the LAI was a gesture of support for Johnstone, and it was also the only affiliation that both the moderates and radicals could agree upon.

The Johnstone affair further demonstrated the complexity and interconnectedness of the international world in the late 1920s. The British and American authorities had to coordinate efforts to stamp out the “red scare” in places like India, especially when subversive agents crossed borders and created transnational networks of communist inspiration. In reading British colonial intelligence reports, it is clear that as early as the 1920s the Americans and British shared common anxieties and perhaps premonitions of the Cold War.<sup>85</sup> And the coordination of efforts to protest the Johnstone affair also connected labor activists in India, United States, Soviet Russia, and Germany. The detainment and expulsion of Johnstone was the crux of American, British, Russian and Indian concerns with transnational flows of ideas, people, and propaganda in the 1920s.

Nehru’s foray into the politics of AITUC in 1928 was a success on both national and international fronts. Members of AITUC put forward his name for the elections for the organizational president for 1929. He was elected. For AITUC, Nehru’s presidency

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<sup>83</sup> Chatto to Nehru, 2 January 1929, File 6, LAI Papers.

<sup>84</sup> Nehru to Maxton (British League), 16 January 1929, *SWJN*, vol. 3, 296.

<sup>85</sup> Kate O’Malley argues that British colonial intelligence agents were obsessed with communism more than any other threat to its empire. See her *Ireland, India and Empire: Indo-Irish Radical Connections, 1919-64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008). This is supported by the handbook for all British agents sent to India compiled by the Intelligence Bureau of the Home Department of India. For a reprint, see *India and Communism: Secret British Documents*, ed. by Ashok Kumar Mukhopadhyay (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1997).

served two functions. First, AITUC sought to harness his high profile status as a leftist in the INC, but also to select someone to bridge the growing divide between more radical and moderate members.<sup>86</sup> The Indian labor movement seemed to be splitting along lines similar to the break between the LSI and Third International had in the prior decade.<sup>87</sup> At the Nagpur AITUC sessions in 1929, Nehru would ultimately preside over the complete break when moderate leaders officially resigned from Congress.

Still Nehru's central focus remained on internationalizing the Indian National Congress, and although the League's delegate never made the journey to the Congress sessions, messages of moral support poured into Calcutta from League members across the world. As early as October 9, Nehru sent the League office in Berlin an invitation to the INC sessions for all members of the LAI and a request that those who could not attend to forward a message of greetings.<sup>88</sup> Chatto personally attempted to negotiate, coordinate, and even fund delegations to India from Ireland, Egypt, Palestine, China, and Indonesia.<sup>89</sup> Visa problems prevented all members, except for Johnstone, from making the journey to India. Nevertheless, an unprecedented number of greetings from sympathizers across the anti-imperial world were read aloud at the INC sessions from Tunis, Persia, South Africa, New Zealand, United States, Palestine, Jerusalem, Medina,

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<sup>86</sup> D.B. Kulkarny (Vice-President of AITUC) explains this in a letter to Nehru (President of AITUC), 6 September 1929, File 16-1929, AICC Papers.

<sup>87</sup> By the end of 1929, moderates or reformists oriented to the Second International resigned from AITUC, which became more radical and oriented toward the Third International. For a history of AITUC, see P.S. Gupta, *A Short History of the All India Trade Union Congress*.

<sup>88</sup> Nehru, Invitation from the INC to all League against Imperialism members, 542/1/29/78, CI Papers.

<sup>89</sup> Chatto to Nehru, 16 October 1928, File 16, LAI Papers.

and Indonesia. Acting as the INC secretary in January 1929, Nehru sat down in his office to draft cordial thanks to places as distant as South Africa, China, Indonesia, Britain, the United States and Germany.<sup>90</sup> The January 27<sup>th</sup> Congress Bulletin drafted by Nehru offered robust information on India's comrades across the anti-imperialist world and an enthusiastic appraisal of the internationalization of Indian nationalism. In particular, Nehru's bulletin celebrated the twentieth anniversary of *Perhimpunan Indonesia*, with a tribute to both the organization and its co-founder and fellow League executive council member, Mohamed Hatta. He also paid special attention to the messages of support from Madame Sun Yat-Sen and Henri Barbusse, both connected to the League against Imperialism. The circular winds up with exciting news from the Working Committee that it sanctioned a monthly contribution to the Indian Information Bureau in Berlin.

At the 1928 Calcutta Congress, Nehru managed to pilot a resolution sanctioning the creation of the first ever INC Foreign Department. Nehru's resolution established a foreign department because: "This Congress, being of opinion that the struggle of the Indian people for freedom is a part of the general world struggle against imperialism and its manifestations, considers it desirable that India should develop contacts with other countries and peoples who also suffer under imperialism and desire to combat it."<sup>91</sup> The January 2<sup>nd</sup> Working Committee of the INC nominated Nehru to oversee the Foreign Department.<sup>92</sup> Because of his political programs and experiences in Brussels, Nehru

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<sup>90</sup> For letters from Nehru to other countries, see *SWJN*, Vol. 4.

<sup>91</sup> "Congress Bulletin: Issued by the Office of the All India Congress Committee," 15 January 1929, File 41-1929, AICC Papers.

<sup>92</sup> "Congress Bulletin," January 20, 1929, AICC Papers.

quickly became the default and obvious choice for the Congress on international issues and initiatives. Of course, Nehru turned to Chatto and the League to supply the contacts for the INC Foreign Department and Nehru began circulating Congress bulletins directly to Leaguers across the anti-imperialist world. This would be an important step for Nehru and the INC as he began to reach out directly to more of his anti-imperialist colleagues rather than through the international hub in Berlin.

But the dominant issue at the Calcutta sessions was the Nehru Report. Nehru's father presided over the Calcutta Congress sessions and delivered to the open sessions the finalized recommendations of the Nehru Report for Dominion Status within the British Empire. If the Government did not acquiesce within a year, the INC promised to up the ante and call for complete independence outside with empire and commence a civil disobedience campaign. Jawaharlal won this small concession by urging the INC to limit the grace period from the original proposal of two years to one year. Still it was clear that the INC was not willing to accept Nehru's proposals for independence in an international world. Motilal argued in his address: "National freedom unrestricted and unqualified is the natural craving of the human soul... Differences arise only when the question is raised whether it is *possible* to have and to keep freedom..." He concludes, "What matters to me is that dominion status involves a very considerable measure of freedom bordering on complete independence and is any day preferable to complete dependence."<sup>93</sup> However, Motilal diplomatically straddled the issue: "I am for complete

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<sup>93</sup> Motilal Nehru, "Presidential Address, Calcutta Congress," 29 December 1928, *Selected Works of Motilal Nehru*, vol. 5, ed. by Ravinder Kumar and Hari Dev Sharma (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library: New Delhi, 1993), 449.

independence – as complete as it can be – but I am not against full dominion status – as full as any dominion possesses it today – provided I get it before it loses all attraction. I am for severance of British connection as it subsists with us today but am not against it as it exists with the Dominions.”<sup>94</sup> Nehru likely celebrate his father’s personal position in support of complete independence, but both Motilal and Jawaharlal would have to accept the Congress consensus which unquestionably called for Dominion Status.

Nehru’s political strategy to internationalize the INC seemed to backfire in 1928. His unwavering faith in the INC as the *only* vehicle for anti-imperialism in India, one essential for his broader vision of India and an international world, did not match with the Congress policy to work toward constitutional reforms and Dominion Status. The INC in 1928 called for much more moderate reforms than Nehru and his international anti-imperialist colleague envisioned. Nehru’s approach to Indian nationalism aimed to consolidate anti-imperialist forces in India under the banner of the INC and also link a unified nationalist movement to a wider world of international anti-imperialism through the League. Both projects – unity within India and cooperation abroad – were essential to Nehru’s understanding of Indian nationalism and international anti-imperialism. Nehru formulated his nationalist politics in relation to this anti-imperialist worldview, and he prepared for a long but necessary struggle to persuade the INC to realize its responsibility nationally and internationally in calling for independence from the British and international imperialism. Despite his differences with INC leaders and policy, Nehru could not envision international anti-imperialism without a nationalist consensus under

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<sup>94</sup> Motilal Nehru, “Presidential Address,” 449.



the banner of the Congress. He even renewed his role as the INC general secretary for 1929.<sup>95</sup> No matter how far apart his ideas and the INC's program were, Nehru retained optimism that his personal political persuasion would win over his colleagues to see India from an internationalist perspective.

#### 4.4 Conclusions

1928 was a year of network building and independence campaigning for Nehru. He was set to serve as the president of the All-Indian Trade Union Congress in 1929, while he continued his role as general secretary of the Indian National Congress. Thanks to the League and Chatto, a myriad of fraternal greetings from sympathizers and other anti-colonial nationalists poured into Calcutta. Nehru hosted, if only for a day, a delegate sent with a mandate from the League against Imperialism. He popularized the demand for complete independence among leftists within and outside the Indian National Congress. Nehru initiated projects that sought independence and international connections for Indian nationalism and labor. This was a process not yet realized at the conclusion of 1928.

The early attempts to send members of the international anti-imperialist community to India fell short of Nehru's hopes and aspirations reflecting the limitations of what was possible in 1928. Nehru could imagine a world in which India was a member of an international community of anti-imperialist nations, but India's connections to this world were mediated and filtered through the League against Imperialism in Berlin.

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<sup>95</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 196.

Meanwhile the Government of India obstructed direct connections between India and the world. The League pushed the boundaries as much as possible, by sending Johnstone for example, and Nehru helped negotiate these limited and narrow passages available for individuals and ideas to flow into India. Nehru also had to carve out a space within the INC for independence without empire to become a possibility. As Gandhi and his father both demonstrated, the INC had not been willing to envision a complete break with the empire in 1928, and Nehru was not willing to split with the Congress. Yet, Nehru had done much to mobilize many INC leaders – including his father - in support of an independence agenda for India that sought freedom to join an international community beyond the confines of the imperial framework of the British Empire. It was a challenging year filled with compromise and failures, however, Nehru laid important groundwork for the years to come.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: TENSIONS, RUPTURES AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE**

In January 1929 Nehru wrote to Chatto about the upcoming year: “The year is likely to be a heavy one both from the labour and political point of view.”<sup>1</sup> He was certain that the Government of India would not convert India into a Dominion State by the year's end, and Nehru prepared for an inevitable civil disobedience campaign and the realization of independence as the INC goal. These likely events meant that the INC would seek independence within an international world. He even found himself president of the All-India Trade Union Congress, which resolved to affiliate with the League against Imperialism. Events and forces in India appeared to be moving toward an alliance of anti-imperialist forces nationally and internationally.

Nehru hardly could have foreseen the drastic and cataclysmic changes on the horizon in the later months of 1929 that brought his relationship with the League and Chatto to a crisis point. First, the government of India sought to whittle away INC support for international anti-imperialist movements through a series of repressive measures designed to sever foreign connections between India and the world. Meanwhile, the Communist International, which had watched the League develop from a distance before 1929, decided to take a more aggressive role politically and financially.<sup>2</sup> The takeover by Moscow ushered in more rigid, sectarian policies for the League. Non-communist members were no longer welcome by late 1929. This perfect storm of events

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<sup>1</sup> Nehru to Chatto, undated January 1929, *SWJN*, vol. 3, 295.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between Stalin and the Comintern, see McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, 81-119.

in London, Delhi, Berlin and Moscow served as catalysts in rupturing Nehru's ties to the League.

The story of Nehru's break with the League mirrored some of the broader tensions among the international left in the last years of the late 1920s and early 1930s. In particular, antagonisms between the communists and socialists intensified in 1928.<sup>3</sup> The Soviet Union and the Comintern abandoned the united front strategy for a rigid sectarianism. Their split with more moderate leftists pitted communists worldwide against not only bourgeois nationalists in the colonies, but also socialists and trade unionists that worked for gradual reforms within the existing capitalist states. International communists criticized the socialists for open support of the capitalist system, while also calling upon communist parties worldwide to sever ties with reformists, socialists, and bourgeois nationalists. As we will see, the League against Imperialism followed this more sectarian line as well, and the remaining socialist, leftist, and bourgeois nationalist members were forced out of the anti-imperial organization by the 1930s.

In an ironic twist, Nehru triumphed in the Indian nationalist arena with the INC adoption of a resolution for complete independence – or *purna swaraj* – at the 1929 annual sessions in Lahore. The impetus for complete independence for Nehru had come from an internationalist worldview stemming from his experiences with the Brussels Congress and League against Imperialism. With the attainment of an independence resolution that called for a complete break with the British Empire backed by a wide

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example “Stalin and the Third Period, 1928-1933” in McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*.

spectrum of the INC including Gandhi and his father, Nehru *should* have also celebrated the implications of *purna swaraj* as both a national and international success.

Paradoxically, in the same week that Nehru participated in celebrations for Independence Day in January 1930, he also fired off a resignation letter to the League against Imperialism secretariat. This chapter untangles the series of events in 1929 that shook the foundations of Nehru's relationship with the League against Imperialism.

### 5.1 The Roots of Rupture: Communist and Colonial Interventions

The origins of the rupture between Nehru and the international League against Imperialism can be traced back to two events in January 1929. First on January 15 and 16, the international League against Imperialism held an Executive Council meeting in Cologne, Germany. The two-day event brought together the familiar cast of characters: European members of the Executive from Britain, France, Holland, Belgium, Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, and Germany; as well as expatriates and travelers from India, China, Indonesia, Palestine, and North Africa. Yet, this meeting was also the first to host a three-man delegation from the Soviet Union, all of these representatives from the Central Council of the All-Russia Trade Union Federation. Until this meeting, Moscow had watched League developments from a distance and disguised all connections to the organization, but in early 1929 the Communist International instructed Russian trade unionists to join the Executive. A special resolution passed in Cologne welcomed the representatives of the Soviet Union, which "by the mere fact of its existence and the development of its economic and cultural life brings hope and courage to the still oppressed peoples in their struggle for emancipation from the yoke of imperialism and

capitalism.”<sup>4</sup> The Soviets came with a set of new directives from Moscow that stressed the importance of League connections to trade unions and communists in the colonies. As the acting president of AITUC, Nehru welcomed the measures made in Berlin to draw a wider representation of trade unions in India.<sup>5</sup> However, Nehru failed to realize that these changes in direction in the Executive toward stronger ties to trade unions and communists also meant a shift away from cooperation with bourgeois nationalists.

Beginning in January 1929, the days of the League against Imperialism as a shared space for dialogue between communists and non-communists were numbered. Under the direction of the Comintern, the League relations with non-communists, and in particular Nehru and the INC, came to mirror Moscow’s policy shift away from united front alliances with bourgeois nationalists in the colonies and toward what historians consider the “Third Period”(1928-1933), a sectarian class-based turn toward alliances with communist parties and workers and peasants organizations.<sup>6</sup> The Comintern learned from its experiments with the united front in China, which ended poorly for Soviet-trained Chinese communists and their Russian advisors. Although Stalin and the Comintern clung to the united front policy throughout 1927 even after news that Chiang and the KMT had turned on communists, it was clear to Moscow in 1928 that nationalist forces could not be trusted and, the Comintern would need to build stronger ties to communist parties in Asia. The rise of Joseph Stalin in 1928, after a contentious power struggle for leadership of the Soviet Union in the wake of Lenin’s death, opened a new

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<sup>4</sup> “Resolution Welcoming the Russian delegates,” January 16, 1929, 542/1/32/36, CI Papers.

<sup>5</sup> Nehru to Chatto, 2 May 1929, File 6, LAI Papers.

<sup>6</sup> McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, 81-119.

era of rigid conformity to party lines within and outside the Soviet Union, as well as an attack on moderate leftists of the nationalist or social democratic variety. In 1928 at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, the thesis on the revolutionary movement in the colonial and semi-colonial countries called not only for an end to alliances with nationalist movements, but a campaign to expose the “half-heartedness and vacillation of these leaders in the national struggle, their bargainings and attempts to reach a compromise with British imperialism, their previous capitulations and counter-revolutionary advances, their reactionary resistance to the class demands of the proletariat and peasantry, their empty nationalist phraseology...”<sup>7</sup> Special mention was made of “Sun Yat-senism in China” and “Gandhism in India” as traitors and reformists.<sup>8</sup>

Moscow’s decision to send representatives to the League against Imperialism and redirect its work set in motion a more sectarian line for the the anti-imperialist movement as well. Until 1929 the League operated with a degree of flexibility and autonomy from the Communist International. Chinese and Mexican delegations primarily funded the Brussels Congress, while the Executive Council and their affiliated organizations kept the League afloat throughout much of 1927 and 1928. But the power dynamics were shifting in 1929. That year, the Communist International poured in money and sent Russian advisors to oversee the work of the secretariat.<sup>9</sup> With Moscow paying the bills and

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<sup>7</sup> “Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in Colonial and Semi-colonial Countries, Adopted by the Sixth Congress,” 1 September 1928, in McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, 235-237.

<sup>8</sup> “Theses,” *The Comintern*, 236.

<sup>9</sup> The Comintern alone contributed \$5000 for the Frankfurt Congress and it secured an additional \$16,000 from ancillary organizations of the CI. This was a substantial amount of money in 1929. See letter from A. Brittleman (Executive Committee of the Communist Internatioanl in Moscow) to Willi Muenzenberg, 22 May 1929, 542/1/30/47, CI Papers.

dictating the rules, the League began to take all directives from the Communist International, while the League policy fell in line with the Comintern. As 1929 progressed, the Berlin center and Chatto began publicly attacking members like Nehru and the Indian National Congress, and by years end, the League against Imperialism purged nearly all of its non-communist members.

At the same time as the January EC meeting in Cologne, the British colonial administration in India launched its own attack on the subcontinent's connections to the League. The government circulated a thirty-page intelligence report on the League against Imperialism condemning it as nothing more than a communist front with aspirations to infiltrate India and inspire a Soviet-style revolutionary overthrow of the British raj.<sup>10</sup> The report strongly urged Delhi to act quickly to sever the ties between Indians and the League. Within a month, the colonial government debated the Public Safety Bill, a measure designed to obstruct the flow of seditious individuals and literature between India and the international world.<sup>11</sup> The debates made special mention of the League against Imperialism as a dangerous communist organization. Both the January intelligence report and the Public Safety Bill debate paved the way for colonial officials to round up and put on trial suspected agents of the Communist International in India either in direct contact with Moscow or through ancillary organizations like the League against Imperialism, Communist Party of India, or the Workers and Peasants Parties. In what became known as the Meerut Conspiracy Case, the colonial state accused thirty-two defendants - 3 European-born and 29 Indian-born trade unionists, socialists, nationalists

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<sup>10</sup> "The League against Imperialism Secret Report," January 1929, League against Imperialism Files, Fiche 328, IPI Papers.

<sup>11</sup> Copy of Public Safety Bill, File 6-1929, AICC Papers.



and communists – of conspiracy to overthrow the sovereignty of the king in India. It was a larger undertaking that lasted from the initial arrests in March 1929 to the final judgments and appeals handed down four years later in August 1933.<sup>12</sup>

Indian connections with the League against Imperialism were one of the primary offenses on trial in the Meerut case, but surprisingly authorities did not charge Nehru with the others. After all, Nehru had been the vocal and public face of the League against Imperialism in India. He still served on its Executive Council and had created an Indian Independence league to coordinate the national and international anti-imperialist fronts. Since 1927, the IPI considered Nehru to be the main link between India and dangerous organizations abroad.<sup>13</sup> Beyond his League connections, Nehru had traveled to Moscow and published a collected volume of articles portraying Soviet Russia in the most favorable light.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Nehru considered his role as AITUC president to be a “link” between the INC and the labor movement in India.<sup>15</sup> For months after the first arrests,

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<sup>12</sup> Few scholarly works on the Meerut Conspiracy Case exist. For a comprehensive survey, see A.G. Noorani, *Indian Political Trials, 1775-1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Devendra Singh, *Meerut Conspiracy Case and the Communist Movement in India, 1929-35* (Meerut: Research India, 1990). Several books have been written by the accused. See Sohan Singh Josh, *The Great Attack: Meerut Conspiracy Case* (New Delhi: People's Pub. House, 1979); and *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock*, with introduction by Muzaffar Ahmad (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1967). For published documents on the case see, Jyoti Basu, ed., *Documents of the Communist Movement in India* (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1997), vol. 2, s.v. “Meerut Conspiracy Case,”; and “The Approach to Meerut,” in *India and Communism: Secret British Documents*, ed. by Ashoke Kumar Mukhopadhyay (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Report, “Visit of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru to Europe” 21 February 1928, Personal Files, Jawaharlal Nehru: Activities, February 1926-December 1935, Fiche 528, IPI Papers.

<sup>14</sup> Nehru, *Soviet Russia*, 1928, repr. in *SWJN*, vol. 2. Discussed in Chapter Two.

<sup>15</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 209.

Nehru expressed certainty – as did his father - that he would be implicated in the case.<sup>16</sup> But those actually arrested for links to the League had minor roles in the organization, and some simply received a solicitous letter from the Berlin office.

From the vantage point of the colonial state, however, Nehru had strong nationalist credentials, and the Meerut Case aimed to pull him, and other Congressmen on the left, away from more dangerous elements like the League and the Communist International.<sup>17</sup> Nehru rightly saw the trial as a “pure propaganda effort and the obvious attempt is made to prejudice the Meerut accused in the eyes of nationalists.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the colonial government sent a public relations advisor to Meerut to publish materials from the trial that pitted the accused against the INC and its leaders. When the chief prosecutor, Langford James, began his opening remarks in June 1929, he characterized the defendants as “anti-nationalist.”<sup>19</sup> He argued that the accused saw the INC as “a misguided bourgeois body, which has to be captured and converted to the peculiar views of these accused, or else destroyed. Pandit Motilal Nehru is regarded by them as a dangerous patriot. His son, Jawaharlal Nehru, is dubbed a tepid reformist. Mr. Subash Chunder Bose is a bourgeois and a somewhat ludicrous careerist. Mr. Gandhi they regard and dislike as a grotesque reactionary.”<sup>20</sup> Colonial authorities mined volumes of evidence

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<sup>16</sup> Nehru to Saklatvala, 4 April 1929, League against Imperialism Files, Fiche 327, IPI Papers. Also, Nehru to Bridgeman, 7 May 1929, File 8, LAI Papers; and JN to Chatto, 7 May 1929, File 10, LAI Papers.

<sup>17</sup> See Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, 68.

<sup>18</sup> Nehru to Chatto, 20 June 1929, *SWJN*, vol. 4, 345.

<sup>19</sup> Langford James, “Opening Address of the Special Public prosecutor before R. Milner White in the Emperor vs. Phillip Spratt and Others,” 12 June 1929, (Meerut: Saraswati Machine Printing Press, 1929).

<sup>20</sup> Langford James, Opening Address.

for nearly four months to pluck any disparaging remarks made by the defendants about the Congress and publish widely.

From Nehru's perspective in early 1929, the Meerut trial's attack on nationalists, leftists, and connections abroad had the potential of becoming a lightning rod for anti-imperialist forces in India and internationally to unite against the British Empire. Nehru persuaded the INC to make an unprecedented decision to pull together a powerful "dream team" of lawyers to represent the defendants and to contribute 1500 Rs to defray legal expenses for the defense committee.<sup>21</sup> In the past the INC policy strictly forbade funds to be supplied to the defense of political prisoners because it was the program of the Congress to "court sedition" and serve sentences as a means of non-violent protest.<sup>22</sup> However, the Working Committee made special exception for Meerut since the Congress had been a founding member of the League against Imperialism, and the INC was an associated organization for two years running. Nehru personally visited the prisoners in his capacity as AITUC president, INC secretary, and INC Defense Committee member.

With the colonial offensive on India's "foreign connections," Nehru had every reason to believe that the Congress defense of the Meerut accused would garner further support from institutions abroad like the League against Imperialism, Comintern, and perhaps even LSI. Yet paradoxically, at the same time that Nehru worked prodigiously in Meerut to protect India's connections with the League and even Moscow, the Comintern directed communists to take a more sectarian line and to refrain from cooperating with the Congress-led defense. Historians have argued that 1928 and 1929 were years filled

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<sup>21</sup> Nehru to Chatto, 20 June 1929, *SWJN*, vol. 4, 345.

<sup>22</sup> Nehru to Chatto, 20 June 1929, *SWJN*.

with missed opportunities when the Comintern abandoned longtime efforts to entice Indian nationalists at the same moment the INC finally entertained ideas of collaboration with communists.<sup>23</sup> Rather than take advantage of the services and financial support of the INC, the majority of the accused - members of the Communist Party of India founded in India in 1925 – refused to work with the Congress. Instead, as one defendant recalled, eighteen of the communist-accused collectively decided very early on to “transform the courtroom into a political forum for the dissemination of our ideology...”<sup>24</sup> To be sure, their ideological platform launched a caustic attack on the bourgeois nature of the INC, the British LP and even AITUC’s more moderate members. Nehru quickly realized that it would be difficult for the INC to defend those who openly attacked the Congress program and Nehru personally. But Nehru’s rather patronizing treatment of the accused further irritated the tensions between the INC and the defendants.<sup>25</sup> On several occasions, Nehru publicly stated that he knew more about international communism and the League than any of the accused. By late June, Nehru already expressed grave doubt that the INC would continue to support the accused given their “way of cursing nationalists in the most offensive languages.”<sup>26</sup>

Nehru also severely miscalculated the support from the international League for the INC defense committee, an error that underestimated the growing power of the Comintern in the League and its hostility to the INC. With the Comintern calling the

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<sup>23</sup> See Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*.

<sup>24</sup> *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock* with introduction by Muzaffar Ahmad (Calcutta: National Book Agency Private, 1967), ii.

<sup>25</sup> *Communists Challenge*, ii.

<sup>26</sup> Nehru to Chatto, 20 June 1929, *SWJN*, vol. 4, 345.

shots in Berlin, Soviets directed Muenzenberg, Chatto, and the international League to refrain from supporting Nehru and the INC defense committee for the Meerut accused. Because the League against Imperialism became one of the primary institutions on trial in India, Nehru naturally sought the financial and moral support of the Berlin office. He wrote to the international League in Berlin and the British League in London in early April to bring attention to the accusations against the League: “You will find that the League against Imperialism figures prominently as an organization ‘controlled by and subject to’ the Communist International.”<sup>27</sup> Nehru supplied the details of the case and copies of the Committal Report and Prosecution remarks to the League’s Berlin and London offices. The machinations of the League’s propaganda networks circulated widely the news from Meerut and “aroused considerable interest among working class organizations.”<sup>28</sup> When Nehru requested League funds for the INC defense committee in May, Chatto suggested he seek out support from Bridgeman and the British national section of the League.<sup>29</sup> It appeared to Nehru that the Berlin League money had been directed toward an upcoming conference planned for July, but in reality, the Comintern dictated clear instructions to Chatto that no League funds were to be sent to Nehru or the INC.<sup>30</sup>

Only the British national section of the League against Imperialism – funded by British rather than Russian sources - offered support for the defense of the Meerut

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<sup>27</sup> Nehru to Chatto, 4 April 1929, File 6, LAI Papers.

<sup>28</sup> Chatto to Nehru, 29 May 1929, File 5, LAI Papers.

<sup>29</sup> Chatto to Nehru, 29 May.

<sup>30</sup> Chatto to ECCI, undated but referred to the Second World Congress in the past, 542/1/44/55, CI Papers.

accused, bringing Nehru in much closer contact with the metropolitan LAI.<sup>31</sup> To be sure, the British League was the most active national branch of the League throughout 1927 and 1928, but it remained a small urban anti-imperialist group based in London. However, from 1929 to 1933, the Meerut Conspiracy Case consumed nearly all of its time and resources, and the British League recast itself as the protector and champion of the Indian working class. This enabled it to appeal to a wider support base beyond London where local Leagues cropped up in Manchester, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Liverpool, and Glasgow.<sup>32</sup> Nehru worked closely with British Leaguers like Bridgeman and Saklatvala to coordinate Meerut defense efforts in Britain and India. Some funds from the British League flowed into India, while propaganda literature and documents moved from Nehru's hands to Bridgeman and Saklatvala in London and then onward to the local sections in Britain.<sup>33</sup>

But squabbles among the metropolitan left hampered the productivity of the British League and its Meerut defense projects. As we saw in subsequent chapters, the founding members of the British League – Lansbury and Brockway – withdrew when the LSI proscribed the movement in September 1927, although the British LP did had not. After a stunning victory in the national elections in May 1929, the LP banned members of the League against Imperialism from party membership. Bridgeman, the British League

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<sup>31</sup> Reginald Bridgeman, "Secretary's Report" in Report of the National Conference of the League Against Imperialism (British Section), February 1931 (London: League Against Imperialism, 1931). The financial statement of the British League in the report reveals that funds (in the amount of 199 pounds sterling) were collected in the form of subscriptions and donations at local and national meetings. Unlike the international League, which avoided disclosing its source of funding, the British League published its financial statements.

<sup>32</sup> Bridgeman, Secretary's Report, 1931.

<sup>33</sup> Bridgeman, Secretary's Report, 1931.

secretary and Nehru's Brussels colleague, having lost his election campaign for a seat in the Parliament, continued to run the British League and the LP expelled him. Despite Bridgeman's willingness to stay on, most of the remaining LP members in the League sent resignations. In 1929 and like the international League in 1927, the British League began to take on a predominantly communist composition with the CPGB forming a clear majority.<sup>34</sup> The LP and ILP distanced themselves from League projects. When Bridgeman, on behalf of the British League, lobbied some of the most left-leaning LP members like Lansbury and Wedgwood Benn for the support of the Meerut accused, he received no reply.

The LP desertion of anti-imperialism and the Meerut defense was no surprise even to Nehru given its history with the League in 1927, but the neglect of the British Trade Union Congress (BTUC) and even the moderates in AITUC further frustrated Nehru's efforts to develop a strong anti-imperialist front against the colonial state in Meerut. Bridgeman made the first attempts to involve BTUC in the defense of the Indian workers in Meerut, but the general secretary, Walter Citrine, rebuffed his requests for support because of Bridgeman's connection to the League against Imperialism.<sup>35</sup> Bridgeman urged Nehru to contact BTUC in his capacity as the president of AITUC. More comfortable with his role in the INC, Nehru lacked the confidence to speak on behalf of AITUC and instead wrote to the M.N. Joshi, the general secretary who had been in London when the Meerut Case began. Nehru asked Joshi to raise the Meerut issue with Citrine and BTUC on behalf of AITUC. A longtime AITUC member and self-proclaimed

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<sup>34</sup> Bridgeman, Secretary's Report, 1931.

<sup>35</sup> Bridgeman to Nehru, 1 July 1929, File 8, LAI Papers.

“right-winger,” Joshi sent a frank reply to Nehru about the Meerut Case: “It is true that I do not take your view regarding the Meerut case, but I have not concealed that fact from you. It is therefore natural that I should not go out of my way to make special efforts to help the Meerut accused.”<sup>36</sup> When Nehru finally cabled BTUC personally in June, Citrine ignored Nehru’s pleas for help.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, BTUC and AITUC refused to help the Meerut accused.

Much to Nehru’s dismay, the Meerut trial reaped fragmentation rather than unity against British capitalism-imperialism in India. Within months, INC backing dwindled and the defense committee dissolved. Both the Comintern’s sectarian directives and colonial tactics of “divide and rule” wreaked havoc on Nehru’s attempts to link nationalist, socialist, and communist forces into an inclusive anti-imperialist front within India. The trial also served as a clear reminder that the colonial state imposed limits on India’s foreign connections abroad, and there would be a zero tolerance policy for Indian connections with any organization that shared a broad platform with international communists. Many moderate Congressmen were unwilling to challenge the British on this issue. Divisions within AITUC also prevented moderate trade unionists from supporting the Meerut accused, but the entire labor movement in India headed for a complete split later in 1929. Unlike the INC, which boasted a broader membership base, AITUC and the Indian working class movement was a more recent and burgeoning movement. The incarceration of many in the upper strata of AITUC deeply disrupted the

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<sup>36</sup> Joshi to Nehru, 11 October 1929, File 5, LAI Papers.

<sup>37</sup> Nehru to Bridgeman, 23 July 1929, File 8, LAI Papers.



movement, and the growing chasm between right and left wings forced a complete split at the annual sessions later that year.

The Meerut trial pushed on for several years, but Nehru and the INC role in the defense of the accused all but ended by the concluding months of 1929. Nehru argued publicly that the trial fatigue stemmed from a shift in energy among Congressmen toward the upcoming Civil Disobedience campaign. As Nehru remembered it, “The development of the political situation was absorbing more and more of our attention, and in 1930 all of us were ourselves in *gaol*.”<sup>38</sup> But he refrained from acknowledging the obvious failures of anti-imperialist solidarity nationally and internationally. Even worse, he miscalculated the shifting relationship between nationalists in India and international communism and the League. This fragmentation ran counter to Nehru’s hopes and aspirations for anti-imperialist connections and collaborations between the League and Indian nationalists and labor. Still in the first half of 1929, Nehru resisted accepting the situation in Meerut as a stark example of the problems with the alliances he sought to forge with and through the League. It was only when the Comintern made an even more concerted effort to sharpen the divisions between communists and non-communists at the League’s Second World Congress in Frankfurt that Nehru began to rethink his – and the INC’s - connections to the League’s internationalism.

## 5.2 The Showdown at the Second World Congress in Frankfurt

Nowhere was the growing chasm between League communists and non-communists more evident than the organization’s Second World Congress – a sequel to

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<sup>38</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 200. *Gaol* is an alternative spelling for jail in British India.

the Brussels Congress – in Frankfurt during July 1929. The Frankfurt Congress hosted another impressive gathering of leaders from across the globe. Once again, India and China took center stage on the agenda, but Africa and Latin America also took on a more important role in the proceedings and special panels on women and youth leagues added another dimension. The strongest emphasis, however, focused on the presence of Soviets and large numbers of trade union delegates from the colonies. The INC sent as its delegate Shiva Prasad Gupta, a left-leaning Congressman from Nehru's home state (U.P.) who was already in Europe at the time of the Congress. Gupta was the lone delegate of the INC once again, but this time other representatives joined him in representing India including members of AITUC, the All-India Workers and Peasants' Party, and a myriad of individual trade unions.

Despite the disappointments and tensions evident in the Meerut Case, Nehru clung to the belief that the League remained an inclusive platform for communists and non-communist and he wrote Gupta to this effect. His letter in late June demonstrated his hopes that Gupta would find Frankfurt evidence that the League was not purely a communist affair: "The fact is that although the League has a strong communist element in it, it has an even stronger non-communist element. We have repeatedly at the League EC meetings discussed this question. It was clear that if the communists wanted to dominate it entirely many others will leave the League and the whole thing would collapse. On the other hand it was equally clear that if the communists left the League there would be no vitality left in it. The whole thing could proceed only on a basis of cooperation between the two groups with neither group trying to dominate over the

other.”<sup>39</sup> Nehru added, “Now that the Government here is making a dead set against the League it seems to me all the more incumbent that we should stick by it.”<sup>40</sup> He asked Gupta to supply him with substantial evidence from Frankfurt to bolster his argument that the League did not hang on the star of communism. Nehru also made special mention of his closest League comrades that Gupta would encounter: “You will of course meet our friend Chatto. You will also meet Roger Baldwin from America. He is a very fine man and I have great regard for him. Also Reginald Bridgeman ... is one of the very few Englishmen who can view the Indian question minus the English prejudices.”<sup>41</sup> On the same day of his letter to Gupta, Nehru also wrote to Baldwin to express not only his regret that he would have to miss the Frankfurt Congress, but also his hope that the meeting “does good work not only in the region of talk but also of solid work.”<sup>42</sup>

Gupta arrived in Frankfurt under the assumption that the League still served as an inclusive platform for nationalists to join the international struggle against imperialism. At the opening sessions, he delivered a speech that echoed Nehru’s arguments that Indian national independence hinged upon the freedom to reach out beyond the confines of the British Empire and join the international community. According to Gupta, the INC “lays stress on the fact that we, the people of India, have no quarrel with the peoples of neighboring states nor with other nations of the world, and have expressed our will to the effect that we shall not permit ourselves to be exploited by the British Government to

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<sup>39</sup> Nehru to Gupta, 27 June 1929, File 4, LAI Papers.

<sup>40</sup> Nehru to Gupta, 27 June.

<sup>41</sup> Nehru to Gupta, 27 June.

<sup>42</sup> Nehru to Baldwin, 27 June 1929, FD16-1929, AICC Papers.

further their imperialist aims... We wish to enjoy at least as much freedom in our country as the free nations of the world do.”<sup>43</sup> Like Nehru, Gupta argued that India could not achieve this alone and must “join hands with anti-imperialist forces of the world” as well as extend “the hand of friendship and comradeship to other struggling nations of the world.”<sup>44</sup>

As the Congress progressed, however, Gupta came to witness firsthand the sectarian turn of the League against Imperialism. A quick glance at the resolutions passed at Frankfurt reveal the hostility of the delegation toward the nationalist movements in the colonies. Unlike the Brussels Congress, where Nehru penned three of the resolutions, Comintern members in Moscow drafted the Frankfurt statements before the proceedings and directed Chatto and Muenzenberg to place them before the delegation.<sup>45</sup> The first resolution directly critiqued the INC: “The national bourgeoisie of the colonial countries has ceased as a whole to be a revolutionary factor in the anti-imperialist movement.... The Swaraj Party and other Rightwing sections of the Indian National Congress, together with the vacillating elements who have succumbed to their influence, have betrayed the demand for independence, the basic demand of the Brussels Congress and of the League by substituting the claim for Dominion Status have taken a large step in the direction of complete capitulation to British imperialism; while the nationalist bourgeoisie as a class are cooperating with the British exploiters in their ruthless suppression of the labour

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<sup>43</sup> Gupta, Speech at the Frankfurt Congress, File 1-1929, AICC Papers.

<sup>44</sup> Gupta, Speech.

<sup>45</sup> (ECCI in Moscow) to Muenzenberg, 9 May 1929, 542/1/30/41, CI Papers.

movement in India.”<sup>46</sup> Other targets of the resolution included the Chinese KMT and Chiang, as well as special mention of similar compromises by bourgeoisie nationalists in Egypt, Syria, Indo-China, Indonesia, and the Balkans.<sup>47</sup> The statement also attacked the imperialist policies of the LSI and the British Labour Party too. The League against Imperialism must guard itself “against the penetration of unreliable and corrupt elements, who want to fool the people by their adherence to the League.”<sup>48</sup>

The sectarian turn within the League at Frankfurt firmly called for realignments against imperialism. It is useful to compare the Brussels Manifesto (1927) call for the “oppressed peoples and oppressed nations, [to] unite!” to the slogan of the Frankfurt Manifesto (1929): “The Second World Congress of the League against Imperialism calls upon the colonial peoples and the toiling masses throughout the world to close their ranks, strengthen their organization and confidently carry on the fight for complete national independence, for defense of the Soviet Union, and against imperialism and imperialist war.”<sup>49</sup> The Manifesto further laid out clear instructions for League members in the colonies to “fight reformism” and create firm alliances with “revolutionary workers of the imperialist countries and the workers and peasants of the Soviet Union.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> “Resolution on the Political Situation and the War Danger, Second Anti-Imperialist World Congress, July 20 to 31” Printed by the League against Imperialism and for National Independence, File 90, League against Imperialism Papers, IISH Papers.

<sup>47</sup> “Resolution,” LAI.

<sup>48</sup> “Resolution,” LAI.

<sup>49</sup> “Manifesto,” Frankfurt World Congress, 1929, Printed by the League against Imperialism and for National Independence, File 78, League against Imperialism Papers, IISH Papers.

<sup>50</sup> “Manifesto,” LAI.

In the months following Frankfurt, the League against Imperialism began to purge non-communist members. The first ousted was the chairman of the entire organization, British M.P. James Maxton, whom the majority of the Frankfurt delegation publicly harangued for his leadership of the ILP and its support of the Labour Government's imperialist policies. Shortly after the Frankfurt World Congress, the executive of the British national branch of the League met and considered Maxton's position on imperialism within the ILP and decided to expel him from the national and international organizations.<sup>51</sup> The international League supported the decision and wrote to the British League that the expulsion of Maxton was "clear proof" that the British section "does not intend to allow anyone to remain in the League who is not determined to conduct an uncompromising struggle against imperialism to its last logical consequences."<sup>52</sup>

Nehru and other non-communists and communists had not been entirely surprised by the expulsion of Maxton. When Nehru first received word of it, he wrote to Gupta that he could "imagine some of the reasons why this conflict arose."<sup>53</sup> In the aftermath of the election and installment of the Labour Government under Ramsey MacDonald, the ILP, of which Maxton was the chairman, endorsed Dominion Status for India. This created a conflict between the ILP and the League's anti-imperialist and anti-Dominion Status position. Bridgeman of the British League explained to Nehru that the imperialist policy

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<sup>51</sup> Reginald Bridgeman, "Secretary's Report" in Report of the National Conference of the League Against Imperialism (British Section), February 1931 (London: League Against Imperialism, 1931).

<sup>52</sup> Excerpt of letter from international League secretary to the British League, in Reginald Bridgeman, "Secretary's Report" in Report of the National Conference of the League Against Imperialism (British Section), February 1931 (London: League Against Imperialism, 1931).

<sup>53</sup> Nehru to Gupta, 1 October 1929, File FD1ii-1929, AICC Papers.

of the ILP is much “freer since Maxton is no longer connected with the LAI.”<sup>54</sup> Chatto was more defensive about the matter when he wrote to Nehru: “It is sheer imperialist intrigue to say that Maxton’s expulsion was due to the desire of the communists to dominate the League. As a matter of fact no sincere nationalist can wish to be associated with persons and organizations that use radical phrases merely to deceive the subject peoples and gain time for imperialism. The Nationalist Congress in fact ought to greet the expulsion of Maxton as a sign that the British League and the League in general do not intend to tolerate any form of half-heartedness or hypocrisy in the struggle.”<sup>55</sup> Although the British national branch of the League was the first to act against non-communists in the organization, the international LAI in Berlin began excommunicating others throughout 1929 and 1930. Nehru and the INC topped its list of traitors to the anti-imperialist movement.<sup>56</sup>

Still Nehru underestimated the depth of the changes in the League and its hostility toward the INC. Even when Gupta sent a rather dim appraisal of the proceedings and the sectarian turn within the League in the aftermath of Frankfurt, Nehru thought perhaps Gupta was “not well acquainted with much that happens outside India” and could sympathize with Gupta “feeling hopelessly at sea in Frankfurt and not appreciating much that might have been said by the communist element in the Congress.”<sup>57</sup> Nehru hoped for a clearer picture from the veterans of the Brussels Congress and the League against

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<sup>54</sup> Bridgeman to Nehru, 2 November 1929, FD23-1929, AICC Papers.

<sup>55</sup> Chatto to Nehru, 30 October 1929, File 5, LAI Papers.

<sup>56</sup> Correspondence between the Berlin center and Moscow reveal an ongoing discussion over the exact timing for the expulsion of Nehru, 542/1/44/55, CI Papers.

<sup>57</sup> Nehru to Baldwin, 22 August 1929, FD 1929-1931, AICC Papers.

Imperialism like Baldwin, Bridgeman and Chatto. To Baldwin, Nehru wrote that Gupta “was put out in the new environment,” but he hoped to hear his American colleague’s response to the meeting.<sup>58</sup> When Baldwin responded, the news was unfavorable as well. According to Baldwin, the League “has been killed by factionalism in the Communist Party... The Frankfurt Congress... did not help much toward that, with its stronger orientation to the Communist Party.”<sup>59</sup> But at the same time, Baldwin wrote a much firmer note to Chatto in Berlin warning him: “... you cannot build an anti-imperial movement around the Communist Party, not in its present condition. All you will get will be a purely stereotyped reflection of the policies (and politics) of the dominant faction in the Party...” Baldwin called the Frankfurt Congress a meeting of “political one-sidedness” that elected a general council “without much influence or particular interest in anti-imperialism.”<sup>60</sup>

The most alarming picture of the communist turn in the League came from Edo Fimmen, the trade unionist based in Amsterdam. Fimmen sent two distressed letters to Nehru in October warning him that the League was taking the “wrong course.”<sup>61</sup> From the non-communist vantage point, Fimmen was right. At Frankfurt, according to Fimmen, there was a “wild heresy hunt by the dominant left wing section of the CI against everybody who was not absolutely trustworthy from their point of view. The congress was in no way a demonstration of unity, but a kind of ecclesiastical court for the

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<sup>58</sup> Nehru to Baldwin, 22 August 1929, AICC Papers.

<sup>59</sup> Baldwin to Nehru, 24 September 1929, Box 8, Folder 3, Baldwin Papers.

<sup>60</sup> Baldwin to Chatto, 26 August 1929, Box8, Folder 3, Baldwin Papers.

<sup>61</sup> Fimmen to Nehru, 31 October 1929, File 7, LAI Papers.



arraignment and execution of comrades showing any signs of not being strictly orthodox.... Maxton was the chief target for attacks by excited young fanatics who probably knew nothing whatsoever about him... Apart from Maxton, practically everybody who has so far had any standing in the League came in for a share, some more and some less- you, Baldwin, myself, and others.”<sup>62</sup>

The letters from Fimmen and Baldwin in the fall of 1929 finally forced Nehru to confront the changes taking place in Berlin and throughout the League against Imperialism. Fimmen and Baldwin even conspired after Frankfurt to create a more potent pressure group of non-communists within the League, and they requested Nehru’s help. Fimmen wrote to Nehru: “I am hopeful that all those members who do not belong to any official CP will rally together and put forward a joint demand for certain guarantees, and failing them, leave as a block... By leaving as a block there may be some chance of preserving this cooperation, which has been, in my opinion, the most valuable feature of the League.... Whatever the attitude taken up by the INC and the AITUC, I sincerely hope that they will maintain touch and alliance with the white workers.”<sup>63</sup> Baldwin wrote to Nehru to confirm his agreement with Fimmen on the creation of a non-communist bloc within the League to either reclaim the organization, or collectively resign and establish a new anti-imperialist organization “freed from the imperialism of Moscow.”<sup>64</sup> By

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<sup>62</sup> Fimmen to Nehru 12 November, LAI Papers.

<sup>63</sup> Fimmen to Nehru 12 November 1929, LAI Papers.

<sup>64</sup> Baldwin to Nehru, undated, FD 16, 1929-1931, AICC Papers.

November, Nehru belatedly pledged his support for the non-communist bloc within the League.<sup>65</sup>

As Nehru prepared for the annual session of the INC in November, he could not help but wonder whether the anti-imperialist institution he helped create in 1927 would welcome the INC at the moment it committed to complete independence from the British Empire. A “troubled” Nehru wrote to Chatto in November, “You will remember that in the early stages of the League we discussed repeatedly what the position of the communists and non-communists should be in the League. It is clear that the League was not a purely communist organization as you have yourself rejected. It was an organization which brought together all anti-imperialist elements whether communists or not. It appears however that the non-communist elements have been driven out of the League. This seems to me a very unfortunate policy which is bound to end in the collapse of the League.”<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, Nehru remarked, “There are many people in the National Congress here as well as in the Trade Union Congress who are taking exception to certain activities of the League and it may not be easy to continue affiliations.”<sup>67</sup> The annual conferences of the INC proved to be the breaking point for an already weakened relationship between Nehru and the League.

### 5.3 A Bittersweet Independence

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<sup>65</sup> Nehru to Baldwin, 25 November 1929, FD 16, 1929-1931, AICC Papers.

<sup>66</sup> Nehru to Chatto, 26 November 1929, *SWJN*, vol.3, 312-313.

<sup>67</sup> Nehru to Chatto, 26 November, *SWJN*.

Nehru's hopes for a "heavy" year had diminished after the Meerut trial and the Frankfurt Congress exposed a growing chasm between the INC and the League; nationalists and communists; and India and the anti-imperialist world. Personally, Nehru attracted great criticism from more moderate nationalists for his connections to the League and the Meerut defendants, as well as from leftists and communists in India and abroad for his moderation in dealing with the INC. He was caught between a rock and a hard place. Nehru began to show signs of fatigue and mental exhaustion, and to add to this stress his wife and sister fell ill in 1929. He wrote to Chatto in August that he desperately longed for an escape from the personal and political stress: "I wish I could leave India for a month or two and then come back. It would set me up for a long time."<sup>68</sup> However, more upheavals were in store for Nehru before year's end.

Events were unfolding quickly in India in the fall of 1929. Gandhi had pushed the INC to elect Nehru as the president of the Congress for that year, a role Nehru did not welcome.<sup>69</sup> Few INC leaders backed Nehru's candidacy, and most voted for either Gandhi or Vallabhbhai Patel.<sup>70</sup> Nehru was too radical and young for many of the moderate, centrist, or rightwing INC leaders, although his growing popularity among the youth and the burgeoning left made him indispensable to the Congress. But Gandhi had the final say in the matter, and he pushed Nehru's name forward. By late 1929, the INC

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<sup>68</sup> Nehru to Chatto, 1 August 1929, *SWJN*, vol. 3, 310-311.

<sup>69</sup> Nehru felt that Gandhi thrust the position on him even though there was very little support within the Indian National Congress for Nehru. See Nehru, *Autobiography*, 205-206.

<sup>70</sup> The most All-India Congress Committee votes for the 1929 president went to Gandhi (10 votes), Patel (5 votes), and Nehru (3 votes). See "The Campaign for Independence" in Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*. Vallabhbhai Patel (1875-1950) was an INC member from Gujarat, also Gandhi's homestate. Patel had been one of Gandhi's closest colleagues within the INC and a prominent leader of the rightwing of the Congress. See, for example Narhari Dvarkadas Parikh, *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, rev. ed. (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1978).

leadership had begun preparations for a much-anticipated Civil Disobedience campaign. Despite the change in leadership in Britain from a Conservative to a Labour Party government, the colonial government had not moved any closer to accepting the demands of the Nehru Report. As the deadline for Civil Disobedience neared in October 1929, the Viceroy of India, Lord Irwin, offered a rather belated announcement for a Round Table Conference to discuss constitutional reforms for India. Nehru, Gandhi, and other INC leaders met in Delhi to discuss the response to Irwin's proposal. A majority of the leading Congressmen supported a fresh round of Round Table talks as long as the meeting agenda discussed when (not if) Dominion Status would be granted.

This agreement with the British raj known as the Delhi Manifesto once again forced Nehru to compromise on his independence principles for Congress consensus. As the secretary and the incoming president of the INC, Nehru was also bound to the INC program, a point that Gandhi undoubtedly considered useful when he put Nehru's name forward the month prior to the Delhi Manifesto. Nevertheless, Nehru considered the Delhi Manifesto a "bitter pill."<sup>71</sup> It meant complete independence "was just a tactical affair, something to bargain with, not something which was essential and without which we could never be content."<sup>72</sup> Sullenly, Nehru recalled, "As was not unusual with me, I allowed myself to be talked into signing... we could not afford to split up the Congress."<sup>73</sup> For Nehru, a break with Gandhi and the INC would only further weaken the anti-imperialist movement in India, and he could not imagine independence without the

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<sup>71</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 208.

<sup>72</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 208.

<sup>73</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 208

full weight of the INC behind it. Even so, the Delhi Manifesto compromise convinced Nehru and others like Subas Chandra Bose of Bengal and Srinivasa Iyengar of Madras to send resignations to the INC Working Committee condemning the decision to accept Dominion Status.<sup>74</sup> However, Nehru withdrew his resignation shortly after as he was convinced that the British would not meet the demands laid out in the Delhi Manifesto. He signed the final version of the Delhi Manifesto, even though others, like Bose, did not. Looking ahead to the 1930s, this distinction foreshadowed major tensions between Nehru and more radical leaders on the left like Bose who were willing to challenge and even break with Gandhi and the INC. This inevitably opened Nehru to attack from leftwing leaders, like Bose, who eventually left the INC in the late 1930s after Gandhi forced him to resign from the INC presidency in 1939.<sup>75</sup>

Nehru's compromise on the Delhi Manifesto reflected once again the unwavering faith in the INC as the *only* vehicle for anti-imperialism in India, one essential for his broader vision of India and an international world. Brussels and the League cast the world as a struggle between capitalism-imperialism and its anti-imperial opponents – nationalists in the colonies, socialists, and communists. Only the cooperation of anti-imperial forces worldwide would challenge the might of European empires. This anti-imperialist worldview transformed Nehru's approach to Indian nationalism, as he aimed to consolidate anti-imperialist forces in India under the banner of the INC and also link a unified nationalist movement to a wider world of international anti-imperialism through

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<sup>74</sup> For copies of resignation letters to the Working Committee of the INC from Bose, Iyengar, and Nehru, see File G117-1929, AICC Papers.

<sup>75</sup> See, for example Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); "The Crisis at Tripuri to the Cripps Mission" in Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1989); and Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, 125-126.

the League. Both projects – unity within and cooperation abroad – were essential to Nehru’s understanding of Indian nationalism and international anti-imperialism. Nehru formulated his nationalist politics in relation to this anti-imperialist worldview, and he prepared for a long but necessary struggle to persuade the INC to undertake responsibility nationally and internationally in calling for independence from the British and from international imperialism.

The League against Imperialism did not share Nehru’s patience and unconditional faith in the INC. Nehru’s ascendancy to the helm of the Congress and his signing of the Delhi Manifesto in 1929 became the breaking point for his ties to the League. When news reached Berlin that Gandhi had selected Nehru to preside over the INC, Chatto offered this frank suggestion: “It is my opinion that, if you do accept the presidency you must be prepared to bring about a split in the Congress and carry the country with you with a fully revolutionary program.”<sup>76</sup> In another letter, Chatto again criticized Nehru for accepting the INC presidency as a “fatal step” for Indian independence unless Nehru intended “to expose the treacherous character of the majority of the Congress leaders and to bring about a split if necessary in order to destroy a patched-up unity and clear the way for a solid anti-imperialist movement.”<sup>77</sup> Chatto reminded Nehru that, “not very long ago you declared somewhere, very correctly, that no negotiations are possible so long as the army of occupation was in the country.... The acceptance of Dominion Status in any form or under any conditions cannot be regarded as an anti-imperialist attitude.”<sup>78</sup> In response to

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<sup>76</sup> Chatto to Nehru, 28 August 1929, File 4, LAI Papers.

<sup>77</sup> Chatto to Nehru, 6 October 1929, File 7, LAI Papers.

<sup>78</sup> Chatto to Nehru, 6 October.

this fresh set of criticism, Nehru reminded Chatto that the INC was an associated body to the League and did not take directives from Berlin.<sup>79</sup>

The chasm between Nehru and the Berlin-based League reached a crisis point in November when the Berlin office appealed to “All Anti-Imperial Organizations in India” like the Workers and Peasants Party, AITUC, Kisan Sabhas (peasant unions) and individual trade unions to abandon support for the Indian National Congress.<sup>80</sup> Instead, the letter called for the “real” revolutionaries in India to coordinate a new anti-imperialist federation outside the INC. It warned that the majority of Congress “shelved the Madras resolution on independence and were willing to accept the status of a Dominion within the British Empire implying the fundamental acceptance of the existence and continuance of that Empire. This cannot be reconciled with the fight against imperialism, in spite of the fact the Indian National Congress simultaneously reiterated its resolve to remain an associated member of the League against Imperialism.”<sup>81</sup> It cited specifically Nehru’s signature on the Delhi Manifesto as a clear indication that the INC “cannot be regarded as a safe instrument for the uncompromising struggle against imperialism...”<sup>82</sup> In the letter, Chatto announced that the Berlin-based League intended to sponsor a conference in Lahore ahead of the INC’s sessions where “sincere” anti-imperialists can meet and prepare for the struggle. Behind the scenes, the Comintern promised Chatto funds for the

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<sup>79</sup> Nehru to Chatto, 26 November 26, 1929, *SWJN*, vol.3, 312-313.

<sup>80</sup> Chatto to All Indian Organizations affiliated to LAI, 20 November 1929, File 1-1929, AICC Papers.

<sup>81</sup> Chatto to All Organizations, 20 November, AICC Papers.

<sup>82</sup> Chatto to All Organizations, 20 November, AICC Papers.

conference and the establishment of an Indian anti-imperialist branch of the League, but only if plans were *not* in the hands of “Nehru or similar elements.”<sup>83</sup>

The great paradox at the end of 1929 had been that Nehru presided over the signing of an all-India and Gandhian-supported independence resolution in Lahore at the moment that the League against Imperialism abandoned the INC connection. The Lahore INC sessions created an atmosphere of action and a call for independence beyond the empire. Rather than fracturing the INC as his colleague abroad wanted him to do, Nehru had worked within the nationalist movement for independence, and the *purna swaraj* declaration carried the full support of the entire INC. Nehru’s presidential address at Lahore in 1929 is most often cited for his statement on socialism as he professed that he was: “no believer in kings and princes, or in the order which produced the modern kings of industry, who have greater power over the lives and fortunes of men than even the kings of old, and whose methods are as predatory as those of the old feudal aristocracy.”<sup>84</sup> But before these more famous and oft-cited lines, Nehru laid out in detail for his Congress colleagues his expanded geography of anti-imperialism and dynamic worldview: “India today is a part of a world movement. Not only China, Turkey, Persia, and Egypt, but also Russia and the countries of the West are taking part in this movement, and India cannot isolate herself from it... if we ignore the world, we do so at our own peril... And if India has a message to give to the world, as I hope she has, she

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<sup>83</sup> (ECCI, Moscow) to Chatto, 27 August 27 1929, 542/1/33/10, CI Papers.

<sup>84</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address at the 1929 INC sessions in Lahore, repr. in *India and the World: Essays by Jawaharlal Nehru* (George Allen and Unwin: London, 1936).



has also to receive and learn much from the messages of other peoples.”<sup>85</sup> Nehru celebrated India’s *purna swaraj* resolution in relation to the international anti-imperial world: “Independence for us means complete freedom from British domination and British imperialism. Having attained our freedom I have no doubt that India will welcome all attempts at world cooperation and federation, and will even agree to give up part of her own independence to a larger group of which she is an equal member. The British empire today is not such a group... it cannot be a true commonwealth so long as imperialism is its basis and the exploitation of other races its chief means of sustenance.”<sup>86</sup>

Neither Nehru’s words nor the INC independence resolution prevented the League from branding the INC as reformist and anathema to international anti-imperialism. In the wake of Lahore, Chatto and Muenzenberg fired off another letter to anti-imperial organizations in India instructing leaders to take the INC independence resolution with a grain of salt. While the League welcomed the independence resolution in principle, according to the secretaries, one must not forget that Gandhi protected the propertied classes who are the “chief support of the imperialist system, and has systematically acted against the interests of the workers and peasants by advocating cooperation with their oppressors.”<sup>87</sup> Chatto sent the appeal to Nehru with a personal note explaining that the Berlin office “cannot help feeling that you are damaging your position

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<sup>85</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address, 1929.

<sup>86</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address, 1929.

<sup>87</sup> Chatto and Muenzenberg to All Anti-imperial organizations in India, 8 January 1930, File 13, LAI Papers.

by allowing the domination of Gandhi and Gandhism.”<sup>88</sup> But Nehru was not willing to break with Gandhi and the INC, even before the passage of the independence resolution. He certainly had no intention of doing so in 1930 after he successfully rallied the Congress behind *purna swaraj*.

A series of letters exchanged in the first months of 1930 confirmed the split between the INC and the League, but also demonstrated Nehru’s belated recognition that the Berlin office no longer welcomed non-communists in anti-imperialist solidarity. Four days after celebrating Indian Independence Day in January 1930, Nehru wrote to Chatto about the hostile stance the League had taken in regard to Gandhi and the Congress, an organization he now presided over. He wrote: “We [the INC] appreciate your motives and believe that you earnestly desire freedom for India. But your earnestness and good motives divorced from a real knowledge of the situation may well prove harmful for our movement.... If the League is going to function purely as a communist organization then clearly it is not the place for us.”<sup>89</sup> Even so, Nehru enclosed a separate and personal letter for Chatto expressing a hope that the tensions between the Congress and the League might still be repaired. He wrote to Chatto: “I can well understand difference in outlook. If this difference is fundamental then cooperation is difficult. If there is a fair measure of agreement then it is desirable to work together. In any event it does not help matters much by calling people with whom you may happen to disagree a little traitor and the like.”<sup>90</sup> Chatto did not send a personal reply.

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<sup>88</sup> Chatto to Nehru, 8 January 1930, File 13, LAI Papers.

<sup>89</sup> Nehru to the League against Imperialism Secretariat, 26 January 1930, *SWJN*, vol. 3, 238.

<sup>90</sup> Nehru to Chatto, 26 January 1930, File 10, LAI Papers.

The chasm dividing Nehru and Chatto, the Congress and the League, nationalists and communists, had grown too vast and deep to bridge. The final letter from Nehru to the League in April 1930 requested that the secretariat remove his name from the executive council list after news reached him of his excommunication from the League, a detail that had been published in Europe even before Berlin contacted him. This “has deepened my conviction that my outlook differs greatly from yours. Whether you have expelled me or not I entirely agree with you that there is no point in my continuing to remain a member of a committee which does not want me and which I cannot attend. You will therefore kindly remove my name from your committee.”<sup>91</sup> The final letter had been copied and sent to Baldwin, Bridgeman and Fimmen, all of his non-communist colleagues that he had worked with for years to strengthen and provide a proper balance for the League.

In the aftermath of the break with the League, Nehru made sense of the events as the product of the rash behavior of communists and their manifestos that seemed to offend potential allies. He wrote to Fimmen that the Indian communist leaders are often the most active on the ground, but they “have a peculiar knack of annoying and irritating others. It seems to be a deliberate policy of communists to be offensive. As a matter of fact there are very few real communists in India. Many people who pose as such are British agents.”<sup>92</sup> Overtime, however, his irritation with communist behavior and hostility toward the League diminished. When Nehru looked back in retrospect on the breakup between himself and the League, he took a great deal of responsibility for it. He recalled

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<sup>91</sup> Nehru to League against Imperialism Secretariat, 9 April 1930, File 10, LAI Papers.

<sup>92</sup> Nehru to Fimmen, 4 March 1930, File 10, LAI Papers.

in his 1935 autobiography that because of the “Delhi truce” the League “grew exceedingly angry with me, and excommunicated me with bell, book, and candle- or to be more accurate, it expelled me by some kind of resolution.”<sup>93</sup> He goes on to say, “ I must confess that it had great provocation, but it might have given me some chance of explaining my position.”<sup>94</sup> After all, Nehru had learned much from the League that would stay with him throughout the late colonial and even postcolonial years. It had expanded his vision for anti-imperialist struggle beyond the confines of India or even the British Empire. Nehru could envision Indian problems as much like the ones in Indonesia, Egypt, and China. Nehru learned that dynamic exchange and international cooperation – if balanced properly – could produce a world of greater interdependency and equality. The break between the Nehru and the League also reflected a split between the international left taking place worldwide between the ultra leftwing and communists on the one hand, and the more moderate leftists on the other. There may have been little Nehru could have done to avert the break.

#### 5.4 Toward the 1930s

Before Nehru had time to contemplate the split with the League in 1930, however, he found himself consumed with the Civil Disobedience campaign. Gandhi opened the campaign in March 1930 with the legendary Salt March from his ashram in Ahmedabad to the coastline in Dandi to protest British taxation of salt. It was an unlikely commodity to hinge the national movement on, but all Indians paid the salt tax and the British held a

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<sup>93</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 174.

<sup>94</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 174-175.

monopoly over its production. Elites and masses alike joined in the initial phase of Civil Disobedience, which quickly became the most popularly based campaign against the British the subcontinent had ever witnessed. Nehru also piloted a no-rent and no-tax campaign in his home state, the United Provinces, to dovetail with the political protests of the Civil Disobedience movement. It sought to relieve the peasants in rural UP from both the falling agricultural prices in the context of the global depression, as well as the heavy burdens levied by landlords and government. Political activity for complete independence surged in first years of Civil Disobedience, and Nehru once again emerged as a leading figure of the Congress activities in the UP.

The early years of the Civil Disobedience campaign were times of great highs for nationalist activities, but Nehru also suffered a devastating personal loss in February 1931 when his father died. Motilal's death made Nehru more emotionally and professionally dependent on Gandhi than ever, and he later wrote that it was only "the wonderfully soothing and healing presence of Gandhiji that helped my mother and all of us to face that crisis in our lives."<sup>95</sup> Nehru's emotional dependence on Gandhi made him most vulnerable to compromise on whatever decisions Gandhi intended to make in his negotiations with the British in 1931. When Gandhi unilaterally suspended the Civil Disobedience movement shortly after Motilal's death in March 1931, Nehru did little. That month Gandhi signed a truce with the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, agreeing to open negotiations for constitutional reforms in London at a proposed Second Round Table

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<sup>95</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 260.

Conference.<sup>96</sup> The Gandhi-Irwin Pact, as it came to be known, did not in any way secure complete independence for India and appeared to lean toward Dominion Status. But Gandhi and the British were too far apart on the terms for agreement and the meetings were an utter failure. Civil Disobedience resumed in 1932.

Nehru found himself back in prison from December 26, 1931 to August 30, 1933; and again from February 12, 1934 to September 1935. When Gandhi had returned to India to revive the Civil Disobedience campaign in January 1932, the government launched a preemptive attack on INC leaders by imprisoning them and banning local, provincial, and national Congress organizations. The UP colonial officials arrested Nehru before Gandhi even landed in Bombay. As Nehru returned to prison, he had time to consider the recent past and reflect on the late 1920s and early 1930s national and international developments. Out of this moment, he produced his clearest statement on India and international anti-imperialism in *Glimpses of World History*.

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<sup>96</sup> The INC boycotted the First Round Table Conference in 1930 when the British did not meet the demands of the Delhi Manifesto. Other representatives from India attended, but it was recognized as a failure because the INC did not participate.

## CHAPTER SIX: ANTI-IMPERIALISM AND WORLD HISTORY

When the Civil Disobedience movement began in April 1930, Nehru anticipated a heavy prison sentence to be handed down. On the eve of the campaign, Nehru wrote to former League against Imperialism colleague, Edo Fimmen: “It is probable that before long many of us may be arrested. Perhaps I may not be able to write to you again for some time. That will not mean that we have forgotten you. It will simply mean that the British Government has made it impossible for us to communicate with our friends. Whatever happens I shall think of you and other friends in Europe and it will be a comfort to feel that we have your wholehearted sympathy.”<sup>1</sup> Writing to Roger Baldwin only days before his arrest, Nehru shared with him the excitement surrounding the Salt March. He mentioned nothing of the League breakup, but rather concentrated on the situation in India. Of his inevitable incarceration, he optimistically wrote that from prison we “shall think of our good friends abroad and this thought will cheer us up.”<sup>2</sup> Only a few days later, colonial authorities arrested and detained Nehru for the first of four prison sentences that kept him incarcerated for nearly five years.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the ruptures between Nehru and the League in 1930, his anti-imperialist worldview continued to weigh heavy on his mind in prison, so much so that he focused nearly four of the five years in jail on formulating his understanding of Indian history in

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<sup>1</sup> Nehru to Fimmen, 4 March 1930, File 10, LAI Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Nehru to Baldwin, 4 April 1930, *SWJN*, vol. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Nehru’s prison terms during the Civil Disobedience Campaign: April 14, 1930 – October 11, 1930; October 19, 1930 – January 1931; December 26, 1931 – August 30, 1933; and February 12, 1934 – September 1935.

relation to world history. The product, *Glimpses of World History*, totaled nearly a thousand pages on world history in the form of letters to his daughter beginning with ancient history and running up to its publication in 1934. It is noteworthy that Nehru chose to write a world history as his first substantial book rather than his more famous works on the Indian nation, *Discovery of India* (1946) or his *Autobiography* (1936).<sup>4</sup> A second edition of *Glimpses* brought the magnum opus up to 1939, and a third U.S. edition enjoyed wide circulation in 1942.<sup>5</sup> *Glimpses* became wildly popular in India in the early 1930s so much so that it became difficult to locate copies within the subcontinent.<sup>6</sup> The construction of historical knowledge in *Glimpses* influenced an entire generation of the Indian literate classes who came to see India and its relation to the world through the eyes of Nehru. This chapter considers the continuities of Nehru's late 1920s worldview and global geography of anti-imperialism in his construction of world history in the 1930s.

## 6. 1 Nehru and History

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<sup>4</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography: With Musings on Recent Events in India* (London: Bodley Head, 1936); and *The Discovery of India* (New York: The John Day company, 1946).

<sup>5</sup> The 1939 edition included an additional chapter on the years from the first edition in 1934 to the eve of the Second World War in 1939. Much happened to warrant this update. Nehru served two consecutive terms as the INC president and increasingly became one of the most internationally recognized leaders of India. His rise to leadership made Nehru's writings more popular. By 1942, the American edition demonstrates his notoriety not only in India and Europe but also the United States. Also, the 1930s world changed significantly between 1934 and 1939. This further warranted a much-needed update. For a discussion of Nehru's rise within the INC and world developments, see the next chapter of this manuscript.

<sup>6</sup> V.K. Krishna Menon wrote the foreword for the second edition and mentioned that the first edition was "sold out" and out of print for sometime. See his Foreword in Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History: Being Further Letters To His Daughter Written In Prison, And Containing a Rambling Account of History For Young People*. U.S. ed. (New York: The John Day Company, 1942). (Citations from this edition).



Overall, *Glimpses* received favorable responses from book reviews worldwide, although reviewers disagreed on their characterizations of Nehru's perspective. British scholar, James Meston, published a brief review in 1939 that characterized the book as a "mixture of history with the Pandit's own reflections on philosophy and politics.... when his bias is discounted, the result is an extraordinarily agreeable book."<sup>7</sup> The bias, as Meston saw it, had been the result of his communist views, and the review considered Nehru the "leader of the Indian Communists."<sup>8</sup> Robert Gale Woolbert's 1942 review in *Foreign Affairs* considered it a book of great interest "as an Oriental interpretation of man's progress."<sup>9</sup> Yet in the same year Albert Guerard in *Books Abroad* characterized the book as a product of European rather than oriental perspective: "Nehru, for all of his protest against European imperialism, is purely and simply European. Even his effort to restore the balance, to bring India and China into the picture, is in the tradition of Voltaire and H.G. Wells."<sup>10</sup> Was Nehru's world history a story from European, Indian, "Oriental", or Communist perspectives? How do we interpret a book of this length and breadth that preoccupied nearly four years of his life?

This chapter suggests an interpretation of *Glimpses* different than that of Meston, Woolbert, or Guerard. Rather than a European, Indian, "Oriental," or Communist perspective, I argue that *Glimpses* offered a statement on Nehru's worldview and global

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<sup>7</sup> James Meston, (Review) *Glimpses of World History*, *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 18, 6 (Nov. – Dec. 1939): 826. The reviews cited discuss the 1939 editions of *Glimpses*.

<sup>8</sup> Meston, Review, 826.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Gale Woolbert, "Recent Books on International Relations," *Foreign Affairs* 21, 1 (October 1942): 174.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Guerard, (Review) *Glimpses of World History*, *Books Abroad* 16, 4 (Autumn, 1942): 438.

geography of anti-imperialism born out of his internationalist experiences in the late 1920s. To be sure, Nehru formulated *Glimpses* as a way to grapple with the meaning of India in relation to the world. According to Nehru in *Glimpses*: “If we are to understand India as she is, we must know something of the forces that went to make her or mar her. Only so can we serve her intelligently, and know what we should do and what path we should take.”<sup>11</sup> But *Glimpses* also projected Nehru’s personal experiences onto the canvas of world history by presenting a story of progress, one in which the beneficiaries of this march were those who encountered, exchanged and learnt from others much as he had experienced in Brussels. Nehru wrote of his purpose: “I have tried to show how the idea of co-operation or working together has grown, and how our ideal should be to work together for the common good.”<sup>12</sup> Those unwilling to learn from others went against the grain of history and progress.

A reading of *Glimpses* as an internationally inspired text contends with more familiar arguments made by historians that cast Nehru’s writing as a derivative of European epistemology. Scholars of South Asia have questioned whether Nehru’s texts, and more generally nationalist discourse, are derived from an authentically Indian epistemology. Postcolonial theorists and especially subaltern scholars like Partha Chatterjee argue that Nehru’s construction of Indian history, particularly in his later book *Discovery of India* (1946), “produced a discourse in which, even as it challenged the colonial claims to political domination, it also accepted the very intellectual premises of

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<sup>11</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 429.

<sup>12</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 6.

‘modernity’ on which colonial domination was based.”<sup>13</sup> Of the few studies on his first book, *Glimpses*, David Kopf argues that Nehru’s world history depends on the enlightenment notions of progress based upon a Eurocentric version of history.<sup>14</sup>

There are some merits to these arguments, and Nehru’s world history presented a narrative of progress closely associated with the basic events and processes in Europe. Nehru recognized the influence of earlier European works, especially H.G. Wells’ *Outline of World History*, in framing his story.<sup>15</sup> He also appeared to be influenced by the Hegelian dialectics of history.<sup>16</sup> In brief, the Hegelian dialectic suggests a formula for human history that moves through time in a universal sequence: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Moments in history might be characterized by a general thesis. But once confronted with contradictory ideas or information (antithesis), humankind progresses through a synthesis of the prevailing thesis and contradictory antithesis. Nehru often deployed the word “synthesis” to define progress. But as we will see below, “synthesis” for Nehru meant the outcome of encounters and exchanges between people from different geographic civilizations rather than the meeting of contradictory forces (thesis and

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<sup>13</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 30.

<sup>14</sup> For a concise analysis of Nehru’s world history as enlightened progress, see David Kopf, “A Look at Nehru’s World History from the Dark Side of Modernity,” *Journal of World History* 2 (1991): 47- 63.

<sup>15</sup> Nehru made special mention of Wells in his preface and looked to the nearly 1200-page work for guidance. First published in 1920, H.G. Wells wrote *Outline of World History* as a means of explaining the origins of the First World War. Wells and Nehru shared similar ideas about the world, namely a progressive narrative of a world increasingly interconnected, although Nehru added a deeper analysis of Asian history, especially Indian and Chinese histories. See H. G. Wells, *Outline of World History: Being A Plain History of Life and Mankind*. (The MacMillan Company: New York, 1921).

<sup>16</sup> For a recent discussion of Hegel, see *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. by Frederick Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

antithesis), a distinction more reflective of his personal growth through experiences of encounter with people from his geography of anti-imperialism rather than an erudite reading and application of European theory.

More specifically, the broader narrative of progress in *Glimpses* drew upon his personal experiences of through his *international* anti-imperialist encounters in the late 1920s rather than an abstract conception of colonial knowledge or “modernity.” As subsequent chapters have argued, Nehru’s internationalism developing from his League experiences was not a derivative of an abstract European epistemology, but rather a set of ideas about India and the world that he helped create in dialogue with an international community of anti-imperialists. I argue that *Glimpses* also retained an internationalist rather than European logic. In particular, Nehru framed his story around three historical moments reflective of his anti-imperialist worldview. First, he constructed a utopian past rich with instances of encounters and exchanges that benefited humanity. Pre-colonial India in particular emerged as a haven for cross-cultural encounters and exchanges. Although a story of progress, Nehru’s pre-colonial narrative emerged as a story of ebbs and flows based on the favorable conditions in India and worldwide for encounters, exchanges, and progress. Second, the narrative took a decisive turn with the advent of modern European imperialism – as the offshoot of capitalism – which ushered in a new era of conflict and competition rather than encounter and exchange. Rather than a trope of encounter, this shift reflected a Marxist-inspired teleology of a world moving from feudalism to capitalism. Drawing upon a familiar framework of anti-imperialism he encountered in Brussels and through the League, this period of Nehru’s history presented

the broadly conceived Leninist interpretation of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism. The capitalist-imperialist world created an atmosphere of “one country or people selfishly attacking or oppressing another, of one man exploiting another.”<sup>17</sup> The third and final turn of Nehru’s story ended with the uncertainties of the interwar world of the 1920s and early 1930s. He characterized this postwar world as one divided between forces of capitalism-imperialism on the one hand, and anti-capitalists and anti-imperialists on the other. In this world of ferment and transition, unsurprisingly, Nehru considered the key to future world progress to be the connections and collaboration between India and the anti-imperialist world, one that he personally tried to forge through his national and international anti-imperialist projects in the late 1920s.

## 6.2 The Anti-Imperialist Narrative of India and the World

### *Pre-colonial Utopian Encounters and Progress*

*Glimpses* began as a pre-colonial story of contact moments, cross-border encounters and dynamic exchanges similar to the ones that had become so transformative to Nehru’s personal and professional awakening in the late 1920s. Nehru mined the history books he read in prison for examples of Indian contributions to cross-cultural exchanges throughout ancient history.<sup>18</sup> For example, Nehru marveled at the seventh-century kingdom of Turfan described in the published travel narratives of Xuanzang: “this culture was a remarkable combination of India, China, Persia, and even bits of

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<sup>17</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Nehru kept track of the books he read in his prison notebooks. His prison diaries are reprinted in *SWJN*, vol. 6.

Europe.... How wonderful it is that in the far-off seventh century, rich streams of culture should have flown from distant regions to meet here and unite to form a harmonious synthesis!<sup>19</sup> His study of the Kushan Empire (60-375 AD), located in present day Central Asia and Northern India, "sat like a colossus astride the back of Asia, in between the Graeco-Roman world on the west, the Chinese world in the east and the Indian world in the south. It was a halfway house both between India and Rome, and India and China."<sup>20</sup> He praised the Kushan Empire as a "rich and brilliant civilization, known especially for the fame of its musicians and the charm of its women. Its religion and art came from India; Iran contributed to its culture and to its merchandise; and its language was related to Sanskrit, old Persian, Latin and Celtic. Another fascinating mixture!"<sup>21</sup>

Nehru's construction of a pre-colonial utopian past of encounter and progress has important implications for his reading of Muslim and Hindu relations in India beginning in the seventh century. Nehru cast the meeting of the two communities as a transformative moment of encounter and progress in South Asia. He downplayed any conflicts between Muslims and Hindus, while those that emerged were confrontations of a political rather than religious nature. Nehru argued that Muslims appropriated Indian culture and norms so that by the fourteenth century, "Muslims kings are as much Indians as the Hindus."<sup>22</sup> Nehru contrasted Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to

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<sup>19</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 123. The book referenced is Xuanzang (ca. 596-664), *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, ed. and trans. by Samuel Beal, (Boston: J.R. Osgood: 1885).

<sup>20</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 81.

<sup>21</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 123.

<sup>22</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 250.

Indo-Islamic India: "While kings [in Europe] quarreled and destroyed each other, silent forces in India worked ceaselessly for a synthesis, in order that the people of India might live harmoniously together and devote their energies jointly to progress and betterment."<sup>23</sup> Only the advent of European imperialism across the colonized world thwarted the age of encounter, exchange, and progress, and in India a "new danger and a new obstruction came in the shape of the British conquest."<sup>24</sup>

This reading of *Glimpses* as an encounter-driven text sheds new light on older arguments about Nehru's construction of Indian history and the coming of Islam. Generally speaking, historians have argued that the British colonial model of Indian history divided the past into three distinct periods: a Hindu Golden Age; a Muslim Despotic Age; and an enlightened period of benevolent British rule.<sup>25</sup> The coming of Islam to India in this colonial version of history cast Muslims as barbaric and foreign invaders that converted Hindus by the sword and ruled India as Islamic despots. This colonial depiction strengthens the legitimacy of British rule as a liberating force against Muslim despotism. Rather than a wholesale dismissal of this colonial narrative of Indian history, the anti-colonial nationalist version revised it by casting the period of Indo-Islamic rulership as a time when Muslims and Hindus lived together peacefully and created a composite culture only to be disrupted by British conquest and tactics of "divide and rule." According to historians, the implications for this nationalist revision are two.

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<sup>23</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 253.

<sup>24</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 484.

<sup>25</sup> This periodization of a Hindu Golden Age, Muslim Despotism, and British Enlightened Rule is famously articulated in the James Mill, *The History of British India*, 6 Volumes (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1820).

First, by arguing for a composite culture, nationalist discourse aimed to integrate both Muslims and Hindus into a homogenized construction of an Indian nation. Second, and problematic for scholars like Partha Chatterjee, nationalist histories by Nehru and others sought to critique, but also work within the framework of colonial history. In other words, the nationalist discourse shared the same oppressive logic of European colonial knowledge, and in this case upheld the British construction of historical periods based upon communal categories that legitimated “enlightened” and benevolent colonial rule.

Once again, if put in a broader context of Nehru’s personal experiences and history in the late 1920s, this reading suggests *Glimpses* was as much a product of engagements with the 1920s internationalism as it was a derivative of an abstract notion of British or European epistemology. Nehru certainly recognized and critiqued the colonial narrative of the Indo-Islamic period as a “perverted and false history” that constructed India as a “land where anarchy had always prevailed, and Hindus and Muslims cut each others throats, till the British came to rescue the country from the miserable plight and give it peace and prosperity.”<sup>26</sup> But his construction of Muslim-Hindu composite culture can be read as a statement about India as a critical site of encounter for the global forces of Islam and Hinduism to meet, learn, and progress. Of course, the argument had important implications to the nationalist construction of India as a secular and multi-cultural citizenry, but it also exposes his argument that the coming of the British disrupted a rather progressive moment for Indian encounters and exchanges within and beyond the subcontinent.

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<sup>26</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 440-441.



*The Coming of Capitalism-Imperialism and the End of Encounters and Progress*

Nehru crafted a history from the eighteenth-century to the Great War as the rise of a capitalist-imperialist world dominated by conflict rather than encounter and exchange. To be sure, not all empires in *Glimpses* were detrimental to the histories of encounter for India or the world. Nehru often characterized earlier empires as facilitators of contact, exchange, and progress. For example, even characters Nehru loathed like Alexander the Great – a man with qualities that “repel and disgust” him – had to be admired for his role in connecting the world. Nehru wrote of him, “One great effect of Alexander's march to the East was the fresh contacts established between East and West.”<sup>27</sup> The Roman Empire and the Mongols also carried people and ideas across and through borders in productive ways. When Nehru wrote about South Indian imperialism in Malay, Java, Sumatra, Cambodia, Borneo, Siam and Indo-China during the first centuries A.D, he argued that these traders-turn-colonizers from South India likely “misbehaved wherever they went, as all such colonists do... But after a while the colonists and the old inhabitants must have intermixed...”<sup>28</sup> The outcome, according to Nehru, was that the people of Southeast Asia “are children of the same civilization as we are.”<sup>29</sup>

Nehru cast modern European empires as the antagonists from the eighteenth-century onward. Echoing the language and ideas presented at the Brussels Congress and through the League, European imperialism was the extension and highest stage of

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<sup>27</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 48.

<sup>28</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 101.

<sup>29</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 102.

capitalist competition and the search for raw materials and labor.<sup>30</sup> According to Nehru, “[T]his new Imperial Age was very different from the old imperialisms of Rome and China and India and the Arabs and Mongols. There was a new type of empire, hungry for raw materials and markets. The new imperialism was the child of the new industrialism.”<sup>31</sup> He traced imperialism back to the “coming of the machine,”<sup>32</sup> which ushered in a new era of possibilities and “freed human society from the bondage of Nature.”<sup>33</sup> Although he appreciated the importance of industrialization, technology, and science (improvements all born out of the encounters and exchanges of ideas), the dark underbelly of the industrial revolution was the advent of capitalism, which exploited the working classes and failed to distribute the profits of industry across society. Capitalism inevitably led to imperialism: “for everywhere there was a demand for raw materials for manufacture and markets to sell the manufactured goods. The easiest way to have the markets and the raw materials was to take possession of the country. So there was a wild scramble among the more powerful countries for new territories.”<sup>34</sup>

Nehru’s reading of Indian history in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries demonstrated a further reading of Marxist literature beyond the familiar frames of the

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<sup>30</sup> For this argument, see Nehru, *Glimpses*, 355.

<sup>31</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 399.

<sup>32</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 345.

<sup>33</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 346.

<sup>34</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 355.

vague and inclusive united front discourse of the League against Imperialism.<sup>35</sup> Nehru's analysis of India grappled with colonialism in India within the stages of Marx's historical materialism – namely a linear narrative from ancient, feudal, capitalist, to socialist and communist societies.<sup>36</sup> Rather than an encounter-driven trope, Nehru's narrative takes a more teleological shift from the eighteenth-century onward. To be sure, Nehru explicitly admitted that Marx's theories informed *Glimpses*.<sup>37</sup> He considered *Das Kapital* in the “select company of those few books which have affected the way of thinking of large numbers of people, changed their whole ideology, and thus influenced human development.”<sup>38</sup> According to Nehru, India on the eve of British conquest had been in a state of transition from feudalism to capitalism, much like the rest of the world in the eighteenth century. But Nehru differed with Marx on the effects of British colonialism in India. Marx argued that British colonialism was a necessary evil to destroy the feudal order and advance industrialization and capitalism. Instead, Nehru's analysis suggested that feudalism was on its way out before the East India Company arrived and the British, by propping up the old feudal princes and landlords, reversed historical progress in India. In an attempt to apply a class analysis to colonialism in India, Nehru argued that Indian artisans, peasants, and workers suffered under the heel of British capitalists and their small number of collaborators – the Indian feudal elements, landlords and capitalists.

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<sup>35</sup> Nehru kept track of the books he read in his prison notebooks. His prison diaries are reprinted in *SWJN*, vol. 6.

<sup>36</sup> See Karl Marx, *Capital: An Abridged Edition*, ed. with introduction and notes by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 544.

<sup>38</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 540.

His analysis of the colonial period may have pushed reviewers like Meston to label *Glimpses* as Communist or at least Marxist. Historian Sumit Sarkar also suggests that Nehru's prison writings "mark the height of Nehru's interest in and partial commitment to Marxian socialist ideas."<sup>39</sup> Yet, Nehru's history of India and the world offered a limited and cursory treatment of Marxism. As Gopal argues, Nehru's Marxism "was vague and confused, for his ideology was to a large extent based more on sympathy than on conviction."<sup>40</sup> Rather than "sympathy" or "partial commitment," I stress here that Nehru selectively deployed Marxist and Leninist ideas within his broader arguments about international anti-imperialism that he encountered in the late 1920s. A Marxist-Leninist framework enabled Nehru to connect India's problems to the worldwide struggles against oppression, as he came to see them in Brussels. In other words, Nehru's sampling of Marxist and Leninist interpretive frameworks were tempered by his search in his own politics and historical writings for an understanding of the linkages between worldwide anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist forces. He never professed to be a Marxist or a communist. Instead, he was a self-proclaimed socialist who developed his ideas through an anti-imperial lens as a way to make sense of problems in India and the world.

Capitalism-imperialism also disrupted India's beneficial encounters and contacts with other countries like China, one of the most significant members of his anti-imperial geography formulated in the late 1920s. The special relationship between India and China so fundamental to the Brussels Congress also retained a significant place in *Glimpses*.

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<sup>39</sup> Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, 331.

<sup>40</sup> Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, 107.

Nehru focused extensively on instances when Indian and Chinese histories overlapped and connected. Before colonial rule, China was “India’s sister in ancient history” and South Asia was the “connecting link between the West and China” during the first centuries of history.<sup>41</sup> The importance of India and China, for Nehru, was that both were the “cradles of civilization” and both had been the dominant influence and facilitators of encounter and exchange for their “children” of Asia like Malaysia, Indonesia, Korea, and even Japan.<sup>42</sup> Nehru characterized China as the “elder brother” of East Asian countries, and the “clever, favoured and cultured one, very conscious of his superiority, but wishing well to the younger brothers and willing to teach them and share with them his own culture and civilization.”<sup>43</sup> Of course, Nehru’s utopian history of contact and exchange between India and China – and the progressive influence of each on the rest of Asia - came to abrupt halt with the coming of the British and capitalist-imperialist age.

*Glimpses* also situated India and the British Empire within a broader world history of imperialism and anti-imperialism. At Brussels, he made an argument about the preeminence of the British Empire, as well as the importance of India as its “crown jewel.” But through his encounters and ongoing discussions in the late 1920s with other nationalists, as well as socialists and communists, Nehru considered India’s struggle within a wider understanding of empires, one that considered British imperialism as part of a world system of capitalism-imperialism. Nehru was careful not to blame British

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<sup>41</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 28, 66. This is an interesting word choice for Nehru. Later in 1954, Nehru and Indians chanted the slogan, “*Chini-Hindi bhai bhai*” meaning that Chinese and Indians are brothers.

<sup>42</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 117.

<sup>43</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 267.

people – many of whom, like his friends in Britain, struggled against the capitalist system on behalf of the metropolitan workers. “It is not a question of individuals, but that of a system. We have been living under a huge machine that has exploited and crushed India’s millions. This machine is the machine of the new imperialism, the outcome of industrial capitalism.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Nehru learned from Brussels and his global geography that India was not alone in this struggle. “When we consider China and Egypt and many other countries we shall see the same system, the same machine of capitalist-imperialism, at work exploiting other peoples.”<sup>45</sup> Everywhere European capitalism-imperialism bred conflict rather than exchange, and imperialists “feared and hated and envied the other, and this fear and hatred made them increase their armies and their ships of war.... It bred friction between nation and nation, class and class, and man and man.”<sup>46</sup> The Great War served as the most intense expression of capitalist-imperialist competitions and conflict.

### 6.3 The Post-World War I Years and the Global Geography of Anti-Imperialism

The post-World War I years – ones most formative to Nehru’s own nationalist and internationalist views – form a story of a world divided along the fault lines of capitalism-imperialism on one hand, and anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism on the other. According to Nehru, the Great War “shook the whole system of ideas on which we had grown up and made us begin to doubt the very basis of modern society and civilization.... It was an age of doubt and questioning which always come in a period of

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<sup>44</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 429.

<sup>45</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 430.

<sup>46</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 400.

transition and rapid change.”<sup>47</sup> It produced two contentious phenomena. On the one hand, European capitalist-imperialists remained the antagonists of his story, but the postwar rise of the United States – the “money lender to the world” – represented the most powerful capitalist-imperialist force that extended the life of the capitalist world despite the crisis of the war.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, the heroes of Nehru’s postwar world mirrored the anti-imperialist elements from Brussels and the League – nationalists from the colonies, socialists, and communists. Brought to its logical conclusion, Nehru hoped for a better future with the resurgence and cooperation of the anti-imperialist forces to usher in a new era of encounters, connections, and progress.

Nehru drew upon a readily available geography of anti-imperialism to understand the issues impacting India and the world during the turbulent postwar years even when he began to confront new forces of the 1930s. A quick glance at the table of contents for the postwar years provides ample evidence that Nehru based *Glimpses* on his global geography of anti-imperialism. It was primarily attentive to the story of India set against the backdrop of events and forces at work in Europe, Russia, China, Egypt and the United States. Other countries in Asia – Japan in particular – receive brief mention in cursory chapters as it pertained to Chinese history, while Africa – with the exception of Egypt – hardly appeared at all. The detailed history of the years between 1919 and 1933 totaled a disproportionate one-third of the original 950-page manuscript. Writing this final third in

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<sup>47</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 685.

<sup>48</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 686.

the summer of 1933, Nehru was no longer drafting a distant history but instead an appraisal of current events as he saw them from his prison cell.

The antagonists of Nehru's postwar world history remain the usual suspects of European and American capitalism-imperialism. Yet these final chapters also grappled with the effects of the global economic depression unfolding during the years he sat in prison. He had yet to be incarcerated when the U.S. stock market crashed in October 1929, so he witnessed some of the devastating consequences of the worldwide economic depression in India. The Great Depression had its roots in the postwar peace settlement as Europe relied heavily on money from the United States to rebuild economies and pay back war debts. The postwar global economy became interconnected on an unprecedented scale, and when debtors defaulted on loans, governments, companies and banks across Europe and the U.S. panicked. Financial turmoil spread across the world with the U.S. stock market crash, and governments put up national trade barriers to protect local economies from a barrage of cheap foreign goods. The laissez-faire economics of free trade crumbled under the protectionism of the Global Depression. Unemployment soared and prices of manufactured goods plummeted. It appeared to many like Nehru that the days of the capitalist system were numbered. For Nehru, postwar London retained its place as the center of world trade, but he forecast a steady decline in economic power for Britain in the face of rising global rivals like the United States, Japan, Soviet Russia, and fascist Germany. With this current, Nehru foreshadowed for Britain the "evening of her great Empire."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 944.



The United States emerged as another key villain of the postwar world. This view reflected similar arguments he learned from the Brussels Congress, the League against Imperialism, and in conversations with Roger Baldwin, that the new capitalist-imperialist danger of the twentieth-century would come from the United States. Baldwin's letters to Nehru in the 1930s – exchanged during the intermittent months when Nehru was free from prison - reinforced the growing danger U.S. imperialism posed for British colonies like India. Baldwin reminded Nehru: “You have two enemies to fight from now on, the hidden enemy of Wall St., backed by the American government, and Britain. Wall St. will use all its power to save India for Britain as the chief source of revenue in trade for an economically degenerating empire...”<sup>50</sup> The problem was more acute in the context of global economic crisis in 1931, and Baldwin characterized the British government as “the creature of the American bankers.”<sup>51</sup> In *Glimpses*, Nehru drew upon Baldwin's forecasts by presenting the U.S. as a newly emergent empire that posed the most serious threat to the freedoms of India and the world. Americans, according to Nehru, “do not take the trouble to annex a country, as Britain annexed India; all they are interested in is profit, and so they take steps to control the wealth of the country. Through the control of the wealth, it is easy enough to control the people of the country and indeed, the land itself... This ingenious method is called economic imperialism... It is this invisible empire that the United States of America possesses.”<sup>52</sup> Nehru warned that India must also be careful

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<sup>50</sup> Baldwin to Nehru, 27 August 1931, JN Papers.

<sup>51</sup> Baldwin to Nehru, 27 August. The comment also relates to the relationship between capitalists in the U.S. and Britain in the context of the global economic depression.

<sup>52</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 479.

to wrestle both political and economic independence from the raj, and the U.S. to avoid becoming part of an “invisible empire.”

As Nehru wrote from jail, he had to consider new forces at work in the 1930s like fascism, but he did so within the familiar logical and worldview of 1920s internationalism. Already in the 1920s, Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) had marched his black-shirted shock troops on Rome and by mid-1925 sat at the head of a militant dictatorship in Italy. At first Mussolini garnered support from the peasants and workers, as well as those discontented with the fall out of postwar peace. But as Mussolini and fascism came to power in Italy, the dictatorship took on an anti-socialist dimension followed by violent crackdowns on liberal and socialist groups. By 1933 as Nehru wrote the concluding chapters of *Glimpses*, the Nazi Party celebrated the appointment of Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) as Chancellor of Germany. Discontent with the punitive peace imposed on Germany by the Paris agreements, fear of Bolshevism, and a crippled economy during the global economic depression worked together to bolster German support for Hitler, who promised a return to national stability and prosperity. Soon after, Hitler banned other political parties, imprisoned the opposition including communists and socialists, and freed himself from obligations to the Weimar parliament through the Enabling Act that elevated him to dictator of a German fascist state.

Nehru argued that fascism was cut from the same cloth as capitalism-imperialism. According to Nehru, the “upheaval of the weak and the oppressed frightens the possessing classes everywhere, and they band themselves together to suppress it. Thus

fascism grows.”<sup>53</sup> Nehru argued that as the global depression spiraled out of control, workers politicized and the threat of communist revolution pushed its opponents to band together with rightwing fascism. For Nehru, the Nazi program represented an attack on moderate and radical anti-imperialist forces of the world including liberals, trade unionists, internationalists, Marxists, pacifists, and “indeed the entire Left.”<sup>54</sup> Even worse for Nehru, once powerful German Social Democrats – the most numerous in the Second International – handed over state power to Nazis and Hitler without resistance. Never before has there been such a “disgraceful surrender and betrayal of the workers’ cause without the least effort to resist.”<sup>55</sup> Within the context of Nehru’s larger arguments about world history, fascism eclipsed other developments as the greatest threat to progress through international encounters and exchange. “Fascism is intensely nationalistic . . . it actually opposes internationalism.”<sup>56</sup>

In opposition to capitalist-imperialist-fascist antagonists, India and the nationalist movements of the “East” emerged as the main protagonists. Indeed, this was the basic premise of the Brussels Congress and early League against Imperialism, one that informed Nehru’s reframing of Indian independence as both a national and international project. In *Glimpses*, Nehru argued that the postwar period witnessed an escalation of nationalist struggles against imperialism in the colonies, and “all these struggles for freedom in Asia and Africa show how the new spirit was abroad and affecting the minds

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<sup>53</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 947.

<sup>54</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 916.

<sup>55</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 917.

<sup>56</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 913.

of men and women in distant countries of the East simultaneously.”<sup>57</sup> The Gandhian Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience campaigns in postwar India exemplified this international anti-imperialist spirit of the times. The importance of the postwar period, however, remained the linking of these movements to international politics. Echoing his claims for Indian independence in an international world, Nehru characterized his own times as a moment when the “East definitely enters world politics.”<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Indian membership to the international world community became a lynchpin in the historical process that would break the existing capitalist-imperialist world of the postwar period.

Above all others, India and China were the luminaries of this postwar anti-imperialist world. Of course the Brussels Congress cast the two places as the pivotal sites where the struggle between anti-imperialism and imperialism would be waged. Since Brussels, Nehru articulated a deep appreciation for the Indo-Chinese connections and collaborations against empires. In *Glimpses*, Nehru wrote of China and India as exemplary models for the rest of the colonized Asia: “The growth of the Chinese revolutionary movement in Canton influenced them [Asians] greatly and they were interested in the non-cooperation movement in India.”<sup>59</sup> Nehru dwelled extensively on the events in China in the 1920s, ones that demonstrated the failure of unity and cooperation between anti-imperial forces – namely of nationalists and workers – against foreign capitalist-imperialists from Europe, the United States, and Japan. His good friend, Madame Sun Yat-sen made an appearance in these chapters as a key figure attempting to

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<sup>57</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 689.

<sup>58</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 688.

<sup>59</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 784.

bridge the gap between the nationalist KMT and Chiang on the one hand, and the Chinese Communist Party on the other.<sup>60</sup> Without unity and consensus among anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist forces, China would remain a haven for imperialist intrigue and foreign invasion. In his final pages, Nehru painted a rather dismal picture of China as a site in danger of Japanese invasion and also “torn by internal dissension into many bits.”<sup>61</sup> But he wrote optimistically: “China has survived many mighty invasions and danger in the long course of her history, and there is little doubt that she will survive the Japanese invasion.”<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, Nehru remained hopeful that both China and India would overcome domestic divisions and lead the anti-imperial forces of the East.

Similar to his geography of anti-imperialism, the other critical node in to the west of India in *Glimpses* was Egypt. For Nehru, Egypt’s geographic location in relation to India made it a critical anti-imperial partner. Egypt straddled the borderlands of Europe, Asia, and Africa, as well as the gateway to the Indian subcontinent. With the creation of the Suez Canal, Egypt became the “highway between East and West,” and British occupation beginning in 1882 ushered in a new era of imperialism.<sup>63</sup> In a chapter aptly entitled, “What Independence under the British Means,” Nehru reiterated his arguments that Egypt was the classic example of the limitations of nominal self-rule within the British Empire. Nehru traced in detail the history of the 1922 treaty between Egypt and Britain that established a nominally independent constitutional monarchy. But Egyptian

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<sup>60</sup> Madame Sun appears as a key figure in his history of China. See, Nehru, *Glimpses*, 833.

<sup>61</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 939.

<sup>62</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 939.

<sup>63</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 736.

independence was curtailed by a set of four reservations for the British: the right to control Egyptian foreign relations; to station military at the Suez Canal; to protect with force British citizens and subjects remaining in Egypt; and of course, control over the Sudan. Deploying the similar analogy of Dominion Status in India to Independence in Egypt, Nehru argued that the 1922 reservations “bear a family likeness to their cousins in India; we call them ‘safeguards’ and their brood is far more numerous here...”<sup>64</sup> So, “in spite of so-called independence, Egypt continued to be under British military occupation,” and “they controlled every vital thing in the Government.”<sup>65</sup> The same would be the case of India if it accepted Dominion Status.

Soviet Russia and international communism emerged as the other beacon of hope for anti-imperialism in the postwar struggle laid out in *Glimpses*. Nehru wrote, “While trade depression and slump and unemployment and repeated crises paralyse capitalism, and the old order gasps for breath, the Soviet Union is a land full of hope and energy and enthusiasm, feverishly building away and establishing the socialist order.” It was “attracting thinking people all over the world.”<sup>66</sup> With a book on Soviet Russia already under his belt, Nehru presented a concise narrative of the Bolshevik Revolution. He characterized Lenin as a hero and a “genius of true leadership” who was able to sense the ripeness of the masses for revolution and adapt Marxism to the specific conditions of

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<sup>64</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 739.

<sup>65</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 743.

<sup>66</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 940.

Russia.<sup>67</sup> Lenin was “the embodiment of an idea” and he lives on “in the mighty work he did, and in the hearts of hundreds of millions of workers today who find inspiration in his example, and the hope of a better day.”<sup>68</sup>

Nehru’s optimistic prognosis for the Soviet Union as a harbinger of change and the alternative to capitalism only grew stronger in the 1930s with the rise to power of Stalin and his early leadership successes in the context of the global depression. The Soviet Union’s first Five Year Plan (1928-1933) laid out a state-run blueprint for rapid economic development and industrialization nationwide. It focused in this first stage on the build up of heavy industries like steel and iron production. The first plan celebrated some impressive successes in the heavy industrial sector, but agriculture suffered and a famine killed millions in 1932. The peasants and workers suffered atrocious conditions and many prisoners of the state were forced into labor camps. Rather than recognize the great cost of human lives and suffering in the Five Year Plans under Stalin, Nehru argued that the people of the Soviet Union “tightened their belts” and “sacrificed the present for the great future that seemed to beckon to them and of which they were the proud and privileged builders.”<sup>69</sup> For Nehru, the Soviet Union’s transition from agricultural country to industrialized powerhouse was a lesson for India’s and the world’s future, ones that enabled him to overlook the crimes against humanity committed by Stalin in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

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<sup>67</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 644.

<sup>68</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 660.

<sup>69</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 855.

When Nehru composed his final letters in August 1933, he had to confront the failures of many of his protagonists in the early 1930s to effectively challenge their capitalist-imperialist-fascist antagonists. Implicit in his conclusions is the failure of meetings and encounters between anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist forces to produce solidarity. Nehru argued that the global depression and the capitalist crisis ripened the moment for transition to socialism. He then asked rhetorically, why hadn't socialism, communism, and anti-colonial nationalism gripped the world? His answers reflected the lessons he learned from his own failures to bring together nationalism and labor in India, as well as the League's inability to link communists, socialists, and nationalists effectively. First, European socialists were too moderate and often failed to challenge the capitalist system. "In reality neither the leaders of labour nor their followers in these imperialistic countries looked upon socialism as a living creed, something to be desired immediately."<sup>70</sup> Whether it was the British Labour Party, German Social Democrats, or the Second International, European socialists "potted away at petty attempts to reform leaving the whole structure of capitalism intact."<sup>71</sup> His arguments about socialism bear the mark of his encounters with socialists in the League and their refusal to associate with it in 1927 because of its communist connections. Second, Nehru asked why communism had not swept across the world with the discontent of the working classes in the aftermath of the Great War and the onset of the global depression. A direct critique of the very events in 1929 that forced him out of the League, his answer stressed the internal

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<sup>70</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 932.

<sup>71</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 932.



squabbles within the communist parties and their failure to focus on the bigger picture and connections with anti-imperialists worldwide. As a nationalist, Nehru perhaps missed in his analysis another vital point that international leftists to rise about their national identities and become “workers of the world” rather than workers of England, France, Germany, and even India.

Without cooperation among anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist forces, Nehru argued that the opportunities in the 1930s for the middle-classes and bourgeois to unite and consolidate had created the authoritarian fascist states of Europe. Nowhere was this more evident for Nehru than in Germany in 1933. In his conclusions, Nehru offered a call to action in this global struggle between imperial and anti-imperial forces. From jail, he writes rather hopelessly, “While we wait and watch, we work for the kind of world we would like to have.” To his daughter, he adds, “The making of To-morrow lies with you and your generation, the millions of girls and boys all over the world who are growing up and training themselves to take part in this To-morrow.”<sup>72</sup> Nehru retained an optimistic outlook in 1933 that the world of tomorrow would be one free from the chains of capitalism-imperialism.

#### 6.4 Conclusions

The reading of *Glimpses* as international anti-imperialist narrative suggests two important points. First, despite Nehru’s falling out with the League, his formulations for Indian nationalism in relation to an international anti-imperialist world continued after his

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<sup>72</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 948.

institutional connection with Berlin ended. The formative moments in Brussels and through the League helped Nehru construct a vision of Indian nationalism tempered by the internationalism and the global geography of anti-imperialism that retained a preeminent place in his writings into the 1930s. Second, by widening the frames we use to examine Nehru, this reading offers a more productive rethinking of his historical texts. Rather than a simplistic derivative of European epistemology or colonial discourse, Nehru's world history came to be a reflection of his experiences as an Indian nationalist on the international terrain of interwar anti-imperial politics. From 1927 onward, Nehru came to identify himself as a nationalist and an internationalist, and this logic underpinned his historical writings about India and the world even as the world changed dramatically in the 1930s global depression and rise of fascism.

Finally released from prison in 1935, more than a year after most other Congressmen of the Civil Disobedience campaign, Nehru confronted a dramatically changed national and international landscape. Nehru continued to depend upon and deploy his anti-imperialist worldview to understand the shifts in the late 1930s as India and the world prepared for another global military conflict. Nehru presided over the Congress in 1936 and 1937, and he emerged as one of the most popular and recognized INC leaders within India and internationally. As he emerged as a clear forerunner of the leadership of the independence movement in the late 1930s, Nehru's policies and activities in India and abroad continued to reflect and echo his anti-imperialist worldview born out his encounters in the late 1920s and crystallized in his prison writings on world history.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: INDIA AND THE WORLD, 1935-1939**

India and the world changed significantly in the 1930s. In Asia, Japan launched an invasion of Mainland China in 1931-1932, annexing the northern province of Manchuria. By 1937, a full-scale war pitted the Japanese against a united front of the Chinese KMT and Communists. In Europe, Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power in 1933, and Italian fascist Benito Mussolini conquered Abyssinia (present day Ethiopia) in 1936. In 1939 German tanks rolled into Poland, opening the Second World War. In India, although the Civil Disobedience campaign fizzled out in 1934, the British introduced a series of constitutional reforms promising greater autonomy for India within the empire. The Government of India Act of 1935 marked an important turning point for the Congress as it offered more autonomy within Indian-run provincial legislatures that were to be elected by a limited franchise. In 1936 and 1937, the INC, while still acting as a colonial resistance movement, transformed itself also into a highly sophisticated political party able to contest elections and win. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, the Congress Party established and ran provincial ministries in nine of the thirteen provinces of British India.

Nehru already began to contend with the dramatically changing national and international landscape from his prison cell from 1930 to 1935, however, his release forced him to confront new issues in India and abroad. Despite the collapse of the League relationship, as well as several years of prison-imposed isolation, Nehru continued to formulate Indian nationalism in relation to the anti-imperialist world. Nehru's geography

of anti-imperialism, constructed out of his personal encounters and connections in the 1920s, played an important role in Nehru's local, provincial, national, and international politics in the 1930s. This chapter in no way offers a comprehensive history of Nehru, the INC, and the world in the 1930s. Rather the scope will focus on several concrete examples of the continuities of Nehru's worldview – born out of his encounters in the late 1920s – in his decisions and activities in the changing context of the 1930s.

### 7.1 Fresh Encounters and Nehru's Expanding Geography of Anti-Imperialism

Nehru's release from prison came with the tragic news that his wife's battle with chronic tuberculosis had taken a fatal turn. Doctors caring for Kamala in Badenweiler, Germany, cabled India to notify Nehru that her health was failing and requested that he come immediately. The colonial government allowed his early release from prison, and Nehru departed on the first flight to Germany in September 1935. For most of the couple's years together, Nehru had been indifferent about marriage and Kamala, while his nationalist work and frequent trips to jail imposed long periods of separation between the two. Over the years, Nehru slowly grew into his role as husband, and their relationship seemed to hit a highpoint during Civil Disobedience when Kamala took an active role in protest and even served a prison term.<sup>1</sup> Nehru wrote of Kamala affectionately in his autobiography, "She threw herself into the [Civil Disobedience] movement in Allahabad city and district with an energy and determination which amazed me, who thought I had known her so well for so many years. She forgot her ill-health and

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<sup>1</sup> Nehru discussed the length of his marriage to Kamala in a chapter of his autobiography written just months before she died. See Nehru, *Autobiography*, 580-584.

rushed about the whole day in the sun, and showed remarkable powers of organization.”<sup>2</sup> Still, his belated sense of attachment peaked as Kamala’s health severely declined. In Germany and later Switzerland, where Nehru moved her once he arrived, Kamala’s condition was erratic, at times seeming to improve only to relapse again. Nehru was reluctant to leave her side.

Although the personal purpose of Nehru’s travels in 1935 and 1936 prevented him from an extensive study of the international world as he had done in 1926 and 1927, his limited engagements abroad still strengthened his anti-imperialist worldview. Nehru had read about fascism in Italy and Germany and commented on it in *Glimpses*, but in 1935 Nehru witnessed firsthand the rising anxieties over fascism and threat of war that reverberated throughout Europe. Socialists and communists - once at odds with each other over doctrine - had joined forces against the dangerous counter-revolutionary forces of fascism. This was particularly the case after the Nazis unleashed their paramilitary troops and secret police to repress both socialists and communists in Germany.<sup>3</sup> As early as February 1933, the LSI reached out to the Comintern to develop a truce, while Moscow in 1934 shifted its tactics away from the sectarianism of the Third Period and toward Popular Front alliances with anti-fascists regardless of their leftwing or rightwing orientations.<sup>4</sup> Nehru saw the Popular Front solidarities as new evidence for his conclusions in *Glimpses* that the progressive forces of the world - anti-capitalist

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<sup>2</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 225.

<sup>3</sup> For a history of the internationals and Germany, see for example Julius Braunthal, *History of the International*, Vol. II, 354-402.

<sup>4</sup> “Popular Front and Stalinist Terror, 1934-1939,” in McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*.

(socialists, communists, and especially Soviet Russia) and anti-imperialist (anti-colonial nationalists) – must unite against fascism. Despite news about Stalin’s repression and the gulags that no doubt reached Nehru in Europe, he never grappled with the possibility that Soviet Russia under Stalin had shared many authoritarian qualities with fascism and that its international policy might be imperialist. In *Glimpses* and his writings and speeches after prison, Nehru consistently situated the Soviet Union as a progressive anti-imperialist and anti-fascist force in the world.

Nehru even reconnected with the League against Imperialism when he made two brief trips to London in 1935 and 1936. London became the new home of the international LAI in 1933 after the Nazi Party raided the international secretariat in Berlin. The British national section of the League against Imperialism had served as an important sub-center of activities throughout the late 1920s. Unlike the colonial state in India, the metropolitan government was rather limited in its ability to ban or control activities of both the League and the CPGB within Britain, so anti-imperialists and communists worked throughout the late 1920s and 1930s with some autonomy. Little had been transferred from Berlin to London in the abrupt shift of the League headquarters. The Nazis destroyed most of the documents and archival record of the Berlin office, while the personnel fled Germany for their lives. The ultimate fate of Chatto and Muenzenberg is unknown. Chatto left Berlin for the Soviet Union in 1932 ahead of the fateful appointment of Hitler as Chancellor. In Soviet Russia, Chatto disappeared from the historical record sometime in 1937 when it is commonly thought that Stalin executed

him in one of his purges.<sup>5</sup> Muenzenberg suffered a similar fate after living in exile in Paris from 1933 to 1940 where he spoke out openly against the Nazis and later he critiqued Stalin's direction of the Soviet Union and Comintern. After fleeing the French capital in the face of advancing Germans, Muenzenberg's decomposing body turned up in southern France in October 1940. Authorities ruled it a suicide, but historians argue that he was murdered, although there is no consensus on whether the Nazis or communists ended his life.<sup>6</sup> With the fate of the Berlin office sealed in 1933, the British League – manned primarily by Bridgeman and a handful of members of the Communist Party of Great Britain - carried on the work of the international League from London.<sup>7</sup>

Nehru spent most of his brief stay in Britain with Leaguers like Bridgeman, Saklatvala, and Ben Bradley, one of the Meerut-accused but also a member of the CPGB and key figure in the London-based international League. As we saw in earlier chapters, Bridgeman and Nehru kept up a steady and productive correspondence over the Meerut Conspiracy Case in 1929 and 1930 before the Civil Disobedience campaign, but once Nehru went to prison his channels of communication abroad were severed. When Bridgeman began revitalizing the international League in 1933, Nehru had been his most

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<sup>5</sup> Nirode K. Barooah, *Chatto*. See also Chattopadhyaya Papers, P.C. Joshi Archives, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.

<sup>6</sup> For a biographical work on Willi Muenzenberg, see Stephen Koch, *Double lives: Spies and Writers in the Secret Soviet War of Ideas against the West* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> His colleagues included Saklatvala (who died later in 1935), Benjamin Bradley (Meerut Accused, Communist Party of Great Britain), Percy Glading (CPGB), and Harry Pollitt (CPGB). For a history of the CPGB and anti-imperialism, see "Metropolitan Anti-Imperialism in the early 1930s" in Nicholas Owen, *The British Left and India*.

high profile contact in India.<sup>8</sup> Bridgeman wrote to Nehru immediately in November 1933 and again in February 1934 to stress to him “the need for India’s participation in the world struggle against imperialism.”<sup>9</sup> He added in a “personal” appeal, “I hope we may be able to think out a line of action for the closer cooperation of the Indian and British masses with the colonial masses in other lands for the overthrow of imperialism.”<sup>10</sup> There is no evidence that either letter reached Nehru, especially given that the colonial regime in 1934 banned both the League against Imperialism and the INC in India.<sup>11</sup> In person in 1935, Bridgeman, Saklatvala, and Bradley urged Nehru once again to take up the international anti-imperialist cause, and in particular make statements against imperial aggression by the Italians in Abyssinia and the British in Egypt.<sup>12</sup> Although Nehru never pushed the INC to revisit formalized association with the London-based international LAI, as we will see, he did cultivate the communication channels between the INC’s Foreign Department and the League upon his return to India later in 1936.

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<sup>8</sup> The papers of the post-1933 London-based League against Imperialism are held in the in the Papers of Reginald Orlando Bridgeman (1884-1968), Hull University Archives, United Kingdom (hereafter cited as Bridgeman Papers). See Reginald Bridgeman, “League against Imperialism Report of the International Secretariat for 1934,” File 25, Folder 1, Bridgeman Papers.

<sup>9</sup> Bridgeman, “League against Imperialism Report,” 1934.

<sup>10</sup> Bridgeman, “League against Imperialism Report,” 1934.

<sup>11</sup> After the Meerut Conspiracy Case, the League against Imperialism and the Communist Party of India were banned in India in 1934. In the context of the Civil Disobedience campaign, the INC was banned in 1932. For a brief history of the campaign, see Bipan Chandra, *India’s Independence Struggle* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989), 270-283. Despite this, the League against Imperialism and Communist Party of Great Britain were not deemed illegal in the metropole.

<sup>12</sup> Italy invaded Abyssinia (present day Ethiopia) in 1935. Abyssinia appealed to the League of Nations, but the institution provided incapable of stopping Italy’s attack. At the same time, the British Government worked to prevent Egypt from becoming a member of the League of Nations.



Once again, the meeting spaces of the League against Imperialism introduced Nehru to new international partners that would expand his geography of anti-imperialism to include Africa. With Bridgeman at the helm of the international League, fresh contacts between the anti-imperialist organization and Africa flourished.<sup>13</sup> The League also worked closely with an expatriate named Cedric Dover, an Anglo-India or Eurasian from Calcutta who worked with the League.<sup>14</sup> Dover had strong interests in the links between African and Indian struggles against imperialism, and he had connections to a number of high profile Pan-Africanists in Europe and the United States like W.E.B. Du Bois, George Padmore, and Johnston Kenyatta (later changed his name to Jomo Kenyatta).<sup>15</sup> At a League against Imperialism meeting in London, Nehru met Dover and other Pan-Africanists, mainly expatriates from Africa living in the metropole. Later when Nehru returned to India, he would continue to develop the India-Africa link in his writings, speeches, and correspondence.

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<sup>13</sup> Bridgeman, "League against Imperialism Report," 1934.

<sup>14</sup> Anglo-Indian or Eurasian in the Indian context refers to a child of British and Indian parents. For the work of Cedric Dover, see Nico Slate, "A Coloured Cosmopolitanism: Cedric Dover's Reading of the Afro-Asian World," in *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas*, ed. by Sugata Bose and Kris Manjappa (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming July 2010).

<sup>15</sup> W.E.B. Dubois was one of the most famous Pan-Africanist intellectuals in the United States. Although he was American, his work was global. See, for example "Cheer the Weary Traveller": W.E.B. Du Bois, Germany and the Politics of (Dis)placement" in Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993); George Padmore is a Trinidadian whose political activities included work in the U.S.S.R. on behalf of the Pan-African movement. Later, he left the Soviet Union and settled in London to head the International African Services Bureau alongside C.R.L. James and Jomo Kenyatta. See, for example *George Padmore: Pan-African Revolutionary*, ed. by Fitzroy Baptiste and Rupert Lewis (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2009). For studies of Pan-Africanism, see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; and Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). For a recent study of the activities of Africans and Indians in 1930s Britain, see Susan Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

At last, Nehru also spent a significant amount of time with V.K. Krishna Menon, an Indian expatriate who headed the India League in London, an anti-imperialist organization with many incarnations, linked at first to Annie Besant and the Theosophists, but later to the LP and CPGB.<sup>16</sup> More than any other person, Menon enjoyed a close relationship with Nehru and became his key contact in the metropole. Ultimately, it was encounters with a mix of his old comrades like Bridgeman and newcomers like V.K. Krishna Menon and Cedric Dover that captivated Nehru's attention in 1935 and 1936 and broadened and strengthened his anti-imperialist vision for India and the world.

Nehru's trip ended with the passing of Kamala on February 28 at the youthful age of thirty-seven. Having lost his father only a few years before, Nehru slipped into depression and loneliness with Kamala's death.<sup>17</sup> In Germany, finishing revisions for his autobiography in February 1936, Nehru grievously dedicated the book to his wife: "To Kamala who is no more."<sup>18</sup> Italy's Benito Mussolini tried to meet the widower when Nehru stopped in Rome en route to India, but he politely declined the overture.<sup>19</sup> To be

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<sup>16</sup> V. K. Krishna Menon (1896-1974) and Nehru became close friends and colleagues in the 1930s. When Nehru assumed responsibility of foreign relations for independent India, he appointed Menon to several key foreign policymaking positions: High Commissioner to the United Kingdom (1947-1952); Indian Delegate to the United Nations and Defense Minister of India (1952-1962). However, Menon resigned after India's military preparedness failed to prevent a Chinese invasion during the Sino-Indian War of 1962. Menon became one of the few Indians other than Nehru who had a major role in postcolonial foreign policy. For a study of Menon's ideas about India and the world, see Michael Brecher, *India and World Politics: Krishna Menon's View of the World* (New York: Praeger, 1968).

<sup>17</sup> In the opening of his 1936 presidential address in Lahore, Nehru expressed this sentiment: "I am heartened and strengthened by you [fellow Congressmen], though even in this great gathering I feel a little lonely." See Nehru, INC Presidential Address in Lahore, April 1936, repr. in *India and the World: Essays by Jawaharlal Nehru* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1936), 64.

<sup>18</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, v.

<sup>19</sup> Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, 107.

sure, there would be no room for the fascism of Mussolini and Hitler in Nehru's anti-imperialist view of the world. From Rome, Nehru began a journey to India and the official INC sessions from which he had been separated by prison and travels for nearly six years.<sup>20</sup>

## 7.2 Nationalism and Anti-Imperialism in Practice

Upon his return to India, Nehru plunged into the heart of Congress politics as the INC President, a position that likely offered him solace and distraction from his personal loss.<sup>21</sup> Nehru capitalized on his presidential position to deliver an address at the annual session in 1936 underscoring India's pivotal role in the world struggle against imperialism, one that reflected his now familiar internationalist worldview and expanded geography of anti-imperial resistance. The body of Nehru's speech appealed to his colleagues to envision – as he did – the “organic bond” between India and the world.<sup>22</sup> Of the Civil Disobedience movement, Nehru argued: “Our struggle was but part of a far wider struggle for freedom, and the forces that moved us were moving millions of people all over the world and driving them to action. All Asia was astir from the Mediterranean to the Far East, from the Islamic West to the Buddhist East; Africa responded to the new spirit.” This new spirit, according to Nehru, moved Asia and Soviet territories toward a

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<sup>20</sup> Nehru and other INC leaders worked together in prison. But most of the Congress leadership had been released in 1934 and had been active for two years. Nehru remained in prison and Europe from 1934-1936.

<sup>21</sup> The INC elected Nehru while he was still in Europe in 1935. Once again, Gandhi had been the driving force behind his selection, although Nehru garnered much more support in 1936.

<sup>22</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address, 68.

“new conception of human freedom and social equality.”<sup>23</sup> The speech also reflected the most recent expansion of his geography of anti-imperialism with the special mention of Africa’s struggles in relation to the INC movement. To Abyssinia, Nehru sent special greetings of sympathy and support in their struggles for freedom. He reminded the INC that the struggle in Abyssinia “is something more than a local struggle. It is one of the first effective checks by an African people on an advancing imperialism, and already it has had far-reaching consequences.”<sup>24</sup> For Nehru, his encounters with Pan-Africanists in London led him to see that Africa as a rising force in the anti-imperialist world.

In his presidential address, Nehru also taught the INC a history lesson about the international struggle between imperialism and anti-imperialism in the postwar years. He painted a picture for the INC of a world divided by imperial and anti-imperial forces. After the Great War, according to Nehru, an intensification of two forces – social freedom in Europe and nationalism in Asia – struggled against the existing capitalist and imperialist order. Nehru argued that: “Fascism and imperialism thus stood out as the two faces of the new decaying capitalism, and though they varied in different countries according to national characteristics and economic and political conditions, they represented the same forces of reaction and supported each other, and at the same time came into conflict with each other, for such conflict was inherent in their very nature.”<sup>25</sup> But, “socialism in the West, and the rising nationalisms of the East and other dependent

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<sup>23</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address, 68.

<sup>24</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address, 105.

<sup>25</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address, 70.

countries, opposed this combination of Fascism and imperialism.”<sup>26</sup> What did this bipolar world mean for India? According to Nehru, “Inevitably we take our stand with the progressive forces of the world which are ranged against Fascism and imperialism.” For Nehru, this global struggle should begin by acting locally and nationally against the British Empire, the “oldest and the most far-reaching of the modern world, but powerful as it is, it is but one aspect of the world-imperialism.”<sup>27</sup>

Nehru considered socialism the solution for India and the world, although his explanation of socialism in his speech remained rather ambiguous on Marxist doctrine. But as this dissertation has demonstrated (Chapter Five), Nehru never accepted socialism in a purely Marxist sense, but rather he formulated socialism as an anti-imperialist doctrine. His anti-imperialist logic stressed the key to progress remained the cooperation of anti-capitalists (socialists and communists) with anti-imperialists (nationalists in the colonized world); in India it meant welding together the anti-imperialist forces of nationalism and socialism. In his address, Nehru stressed that socialism in India meant a “new civilization radically different from the present capitalist order.”<sup>28</sup>

Nehru’s presidential address concentrated much more on the international dimensions of anti-imperialist struggle, while he attended much less to the biggest national issue at hand in 1936 – whether the INC should boycott or participate in the provincial elections introduced by the 1935 Government of India Act. As the Civil Disobedience campaign fizzled out slowly in 1934, the INC had to chart a post-campaign

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<sup>26</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address, 70.

<sup>27</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address, 70.

<sup>28</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address, 83.

course. The British fueled the debate within the INC on this question by offering a fresh set of constitutional reforms that called for Indian-run provincial ministries and an All-India Federation of British Indian and Princely states. Provincial ministry representatives from British India – those provinces under direct colonial rule - were to be elected by a limited franchise, while representatives of Princely States – those indirectly ruled by the British through local Indian princes – were to be appointed by local rulers. It offered provincial autonomy, and a share of power at the All-India central legislature. However, at the provincial level, the British-appointed Governor retained overriding authority, and the British Parliament and Indian Viceroy at the federal level continued to control defense, foreign affairs, and veto privileges.<sup>29</sup> Colonial rule remained firmly intact, while autonomy was curtailed at every level of the new constitutional government. But to entice Congressmen, the British called for elections in early 1937 for the provincial ministries.

Reminiscent of earlier arguments against Dominion Status, Nehru deployed the logic of internationalism to argue against participating in the provincial ministries created under the Government of India Act. He reminded the INC that provincial autonomy was a ploy to keep India within the British Empire as a Dominion State, while acceptance of such conditions made the INC “partners” of empire and “cooperation in some measure with the repressive apparatus of imperialism.”<sup>30</sup> Nehru asked his colleagues rhetorically, “In this India, crying aloud for radical and fundamental change, in this world pregnant with revolutionary and dynamic possibility, are we to forget our mission and our historic

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<sup>29</sup> For discussion of the 1935 Government of India Act, see “The Strategic Debate – 1934-1937” in Bipan Chandra, *India’s Struggle for Independence*.

<sup>30</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address, 91.

destiny, and slide back to static futility?”<sup>31</sup> India, according to Nehru, must recognize its role nationally and internationally. He argued, “... if we remain within the imperialist fold, whatever our name or status, whatever outward semblance of political power we might have, we remain cribbed and confined and allied to and dominated by the reactionary forces and the great financial vested interests of the capitalists world”<sup>32</sup> The Congress, according to Nehru, must demand complete independence and join the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist forces worldwide.

Yet, Nehru also thought the INC should campaign for the elections as a means to bring the Congress message to the Indian people. Nehru intended to use the campaign trail as an opportunity and platform to deliver directly to the masses his personal message about Indian nationalism and socialism in relation to international anti-imperialism. In his presidential address, Nehru argued: “One of the principal reasons for our seeking election will be to carry the message of the Congress to the millions of voters and to the scores of millions of the disenfranchised, to acquaint them with our future programme and policy, to make the masses realize that we not only stand for them but that we are of them and seek to cooperate with them in removing their social and economic burdens.”<sup>33</sup> However, it was *his* message – not a broadly conceived Congress message - that Nehru intended to deliver on the campaign trail.

In the aftermath of the 1936 INC sessions, Nehru toured the local and provincial landscape of India to campaign for the Indian National Congress on a platform echoing

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<sup>31</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address, 90.

<sup>32</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address, 71.

<sup>33</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address, 89.

his ideas about India and the world. In a speech filmed for a documentary aptly entitled, “Pandit Jawaharlal’s Message,” Nehru spoke in Hindi before a crowd in Bombay and articulated a set of ideas representative of the many speeches to the masses Nehru made during the election campaign and ones that summarize his construction of India in relation to international anti-imperialism. He began with a now familiar framework of India facing a world divided:

On one side there are people who want to advance the world further and free the people from the chains of imperialism and capitalism. On the other side, there are a handful of people who are deriving benefit from the present state of affairs and are happy and well off and want to perpetuate the present state of things. There is a conflict going on between these two groups. The question is which side our country, our people are to stand. Out of these two groups I have no doubt that our country will side with that group which stands for independence and socialism. If there is any country in the world which stands most in need of this, that is, independence and socialism, it is our own poverty-stricken country where unemployment prevails. For this reason I entertain the hope that our countrymen will make the fullest effort to make our country independent and start a movement for the reorganization of the society so that the country may be guided by the principles of socialism and side by side it may contribute to the efforts that are being made for the freedom of humanity. Our independence should be consistent with the independence of the world so that we may share in the struggle and success of humanity. Only then our country will become really independent and every human being will be able to become independent and make progress to the utmost of his capacity.<sup>34</sup>

Across the local, provincial, and national terrain, Nehru presented his countrymen with this particular set of ideas about Indian nationalism, socialism, and the internationalist world. His tour of India reached “legendary proportions” as he traveled nearly 80,000 kilometers across rural and urban India and addressed more than 10 million people.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Nehru, Speech 19 May 1936 in Bombay, repr. and trans. in *SWJN*, vol. 7, 250.

<sup>35</sup> Bipan Chandra, *India’s Struggle for Independence*, 322.



Nehru's popularity soared during the campaign, as Indians in villages and cities alike came to see the "glamorous prince" of the Indian National Congress.<sup>36</sup>

Nehru also spearheaded another internationalist project in 1936 that bolstered India's representation in the anti-imperialist world arena. Nehru's internationalism since the late 1920s had dual tasks - informing India about the world and educating the world about India – which mirrored his belief in the dynamic exchange between India and the world. He also oversaw the reopening of the Congress Foreign Department (FD) to reach out to and inform the world about India in the 1930s. Originally established in 1928 at the behest of Nehru, the development of the FD stagnated in the late 1920s and early 1930s during the run-up to Civil Disobedience. In 1936, nearly a decade later, the INC mandated a revitalization of the FD. Nehru had been the INC's point man for foreign relations since 1927, and once again the Working Committee's appointed him the logical candidate for revamping the FD which was to be located in his hometown, Allahabad. On the campaign trail during much of 1936, Nehru hired a full-time general secretary for the FD, Rammanohar Lohia, a much younger leftist Congressman from the U.P. and one time Indian expatriate in Germany.<sup>37</sup> Nehru and Lohia coordinated and produced two sets of literature: one prepared for an international audience to disseminate news and

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<sup>36</sup> Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, 114.

<sup>37</sup> Rammanohar Lohia (1910-1967) was a member of the Congress Socialist Party and the INC. He went to Berlin University in 1929 at the time Nehru and Chatto collaborated on the Indian Information Bureau that supported Indian students in Germany. Nehru appointed him FD secretary in 1936, where he worked until a series of critical articles on the British government landed him in jail in 1939 until and through the Quit India movement, 1942-1945. For one of the few works on Lohia, see Karuna Kaushik, *The Russian Revolution and Indian Nationalism: Studies of Lajpat Rai, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Rammanohar Lohia* (Delhi: Chanayaka Publications, 1984).

propaganda about Indian nationalism to the world; the other informed the literate classes of events unfolding around the world.

In a short six months, the FD boasted a staggering network of exchange with over 400 anti-imperial partners worldwide.<sup>38</sup> Nehru called upon his former League colleagues for facilitating the FD connections. Bridgeman and the London-based League sent many of the FD's initial contacts.<sup>39</sup> Roger Baldwin, Nehru's former League colleague from the U.S., supplied over twenty of FD connections in the western hemisphere in 1936.<sup>40</sup> Other former Leaguers from France and South Africa also came to exchange letters and news materials with Nehru and the FD.<sup>41</sup>

His fresh encounters with Pan-Africanists earlier in 1935 and 1936 laid the groundwork for Nehru to cultivate networks between the INC and the African diaspora. London expatriate Cedric Dover was an important facilitator here. In April 1936, Dover wrote to Nehru about the "feeling of affinity that the Afro-Americans have with us, and of their desire for closer cultural contacts."<sup>42</sup> Dover enclosed for Nehru an article by W.E.B. Du Bois entitled "The Clash of Colour: Indians and American Negroes,"

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<sup>38</sup> Lohia, Report, AICC Papers.

<sup>39</sup> Bridgeman to FD, 2 July 1936, File FD7-1936, AICC Papers.

<sup>40</sup> Baldwin to FD, 2 July 1936, File FD7-1936, AICC Papers. Baldwin also supplied significant newsletters on the ACLU requested by Nehru to help organize the first Indian Civil Liberties Union. See File FD9-1936, AICC Papers.

<sup>41</sup> Madame Duchene and Henri Barbusse of France, as well as La Guma of South Africa. See Files FD7-1936 and FD8-1936, AICC Papers.

<sup>42</sup> Dover to Nehru, April 1936, File FD8-1936, AICC Papers.

published in *The Aryan Path*.<sup>43</sup> The biggest gap between India and the African American cooperation, according to Du Bois, was the utter ignorance both had for their respective counterparts. Nehru expressed great interest in the matter, and he forwarded the exchange to Lohia to facilitate further FD connections with Dover and the U.S.<sup>44</sup> In June, Dover supplied the contact information and letters of introduction to Du Bois, George Padmore, C.L.R. James, and Johnston Kenyatta. The latter three all worked within the Pan-African Federation in London, and Padmore responded to the FD with enthusiasm: “Our enemy is a common foe, and it is therefore necessary for us to lay the basis of the establishment of a united front of the colonial peoples if progress is to be made. This has long been our dream. And while we felt that the opportunity was ripe, we have found ourselves so engrossed with the immediate day-to-day struggle of our people, that we have not had the opportunity of proposing the idea. Now that we have heard from you, we hope to go forward with it, feeling certain that it will meet with a warm response among your colleagues.”<sup>45</sup> Padmore conveyed his warmest wishes to Nehru in particular: “It is hardly necessary for me to say in what high regard we hold your esteemed President, Comrade Nehru, and watch with great interest the lead which he is giving the Congress.” He concluded, “Again we salute you in the spirit of international anti-imperialist solidarity, and beg you convey our best regards to Comrade Nehru and his co-workers.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Copy enclosed in Dover to Nehru, April 1936, AICC Papers.

<sup>44</sup> Nehru to Dover, 22 April 1936, File FD8-1936, AICC Papers.

<sup>45</sup> Padmore to FD, 5 August 1936, File FD8-1936, AICC Papers.

<sup>46</sup> Padmore to FD, 5 August, AICC Papers.

There was a shift in Nehru's concentrations from anti-imperial connections filtered through foreign-based headquarters like the League against Imperialism toward an India-based FD. This shift to India-centered connections reflected the broader possibilities for the INC to reach out beyond the borders of India and directly to anti-imperialist partners abroad. Compare this to the late 1920s when Nehru's sentiment at Brussels that an Asiatic federation in 1927 was "premature" given "various parts of Asia are more inaccessible to each other than they are to Europe and at present moment Europe is the best meeting ground for Asiatic nationalities."<sup>47</sup> With the demise of the INC and League relationship, necessity rendered direct connections not only possible, but also desirable. This shift also enabled Nehru opportunities for deeper and more personal contact with counter parts abroad and laid the groundwork for his postcolonial international relations. It is important, too, that the British, with the passage of the Government of India Act, allowed more flexibility for Indian autonomy within the empire and this enabled Nehru and the FD to develop more concrete connections with the international world beyond the British Empire.<sup>48</sup>

Much of Nehru's personal appeal and popularity in 1936 can be attributed to a significant support base from a burgeoning Congress left that shared with him similar ideas about internationalism and socialism. Nehru had been somewhat of a maverick in the late 1920s as the lone spokesman for complete independence and the left within the INC. The young Jawaharlal of the 1920s – although he turned forty in 1929 – rebelled

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<sup>47</sup> Nehru, Report on the Brussels Congress, March 1927, *SWJN*, vol. 2, 290.

<sup>48</sup> Historians have argued that the British saw Nehru as the likely political leader of an eventual independent India, and he enjoyed greater access to international connections in the 1930s. See, Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru*.

against his father and his father-like figure, Gandhi, in his attempts to persuade the INC to accept his more leftist position. His campaigns for *purna swaraj* and a socialist program for the Congress had made him a luminary among the youth movements and nascent left of the 1920s. Only Subhas Chandra Bose rivaled his stature as a key figure on the left-leaning fringes of mainstream Indian politics in the late 1920s. In 1936, however, Nehru encountered a new environment within the INC. While he sat in prison for five years, many left-leaning Congressmen worked to mobilize and press the INC for a more radical and socialist program. Founded in 1934, the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) provided an umbrella organization within the Congress for wide range of leftists. Most members were inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideology and thought Gandhi pandered too much to Indian capitalist and landholding classes, but the CSP also drew Indian communists after the government of India banned the Communist Party of India and the Comintern shifted to the Popular Front in 1934.

Despite CSP hopes that he would join and lead the group once he returned to India, Nehru remained aloof. Why wouldn't a self-professed socialist join and lead the CSP? Historians have not adequately explained why Nehru refused to join the CSP.<sup>49</sup> Yet if we consider Nehru's life experiences in the late 1920s, his decision to keep his distance from the CSP is not surprising. Nehru's contentious relations with the League and even Moscow served as significant personal and professional lessons in the potential dissonance between the internationalist and nationalist platforms, ones that placed him between a rock and a hard place in 1929. Nehru had clung to a belief in an anti-

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<sup>49</sup> For a brief discussion, see Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, 100; and Zachariah, "Ineffectual Angel," in *Nehru*.

imperialist unity that would attract socialists, communists, and nationalists, and felt that the INC was the only vessel capable of consolidating these forces in India. He relied on Gandhi for personally, too, and this forced him to always temper his radical and leftist policies when the elder leader pressured him. Nehru also depended on Gandhi not only for political mentorship, but also personal dependence after Motilal's death. Gandhi had used Nehru's unwavering faith in the Congress, and his faith in the older leader, to lock him into compromises on independence in 1928, 1929, and 1931. When the League against Imperialism pushed Nehru to break with the INC, he had demurred and his one-time comrades in Berlin turned on him. The reversal of relations with the League coupled with an unpredictable Gandhi, who was willing to compromise with the British, had forced Nehru into painful decisions to save the unity of the INC at the expense of his internationalism.

An older and wiser Nehru of the 1930s would not allow himself to be wedged between the demands of the INC on the one hand, and the international and national left on the other. His role in the INC would be the voice of the international and national left, but without the institutional constraints of either. His presidential address explained, "I work for Indian independence because the nationalist in me cannot tolerate alien domination; I work for it even more because for me it is the inevitable step to social and economic change." Through the Congress and nationwide campaigning in 1936 and early 1937, Nehru explicitly sought to "convert the Congress and the country" to socialism and internationalism.<sup>50</sup> But this conversion – one he never fully succeeded in accomplishing -

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<sup>50</sup> Nehru, Presidential Address, 84.

would be carried out in his personal capacity and free of the constraints of the CSP or any sect within the INC.

Not all facets of the Congress welcomed Nehru's worldview, election message, and programs. The Congress rightwing – a mix of landholding elites, business owners and capitalists, and also Hindu nationalists – had been alarmed by Nehru's demands for socialism and the redistribution of land and economic resources to the workers and peasants. Historians have considered INC in the mid-1930s as a political battleground between the left and the right.<sup>51</sup> While the left had grown significantly in the 1930s and Nehru and Bose held the presidency of the INC for three consecutive years between 1936 and 1938, the rightwing dominated the Working Committee, and Gandhi, whose closest confidants included influential Indian capitalists, like G.D. Birla, backed the interests of traditional elites, landholders, and capitalists. Nehru had been more vocal in expressing the left critique of Gandhian policies in his autobiography published in 1936. For example, Nehru openly and candidly criticized Gandhi's social reforms as a "glorification of poverty."<sup>52</sup> He added that, "poverty seemed to me a hateful thing, to be fought and rooted out and not to be encouraged in any way. This inevitably led to an attack on a system which tolerated and produced poverty, and those who shrunk from this had of necessity to justify poverty in some way."<sup>53</sup> According to Nehru, Gandhi "would lay stress on the rich treating their riches as a trust for the people," a view that Nehru thought

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<sup>51</sup> Sumit Sarkar is particularly attentive to the tensions between the left and right. For the period between 1935 and 1939, see his *Modern India, 1885-1947* (Macmillan: New Delhi, 1983), 337-377.

<sup>52</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 203.

<sup>53</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 203.

was of “considerable antiquity.”<sup>54</sup> Seeing socialism as a solution to eradicate poverty, Nehru loathed Gandhi’s ideas about trusteeship because it did not attack the root problem of social inequality.

Nevertheless, when faced with a break from Gandhi and the rightwing-dominated Working Committee, Nehru could never split with the Congress as the only institution capable of uniting anti-imperialist forces in India. However, Nehru’s loyalties to the INC would be tested again in 1937. The elections in January and February of 1937 marked an important turning point for the Congress, which won 716 seats out of 1,161 seats contested. Nehru had been instrumental to this victory having campaigned heavily for the Congress as a means to reconnect with the masses and deliver his own personal message of nationalism and internationalism. But for Nehru, the election was a means to deliver the message, while the provincial seats were to be boycotted. He successfully passed a resolution in the UP provincial Congress Committee to abstain from taking office, and he headed to Delhi for the All-India Working Committee meeting in March to celebrate the popular success of the Congress and to ensure that the INC would not participate in other provincial ministries. A testament to the popularity of Nehru, the Congress elected him president for a second consecutive year. However, immediately after doing so, the INC Working Committee promptly over-ruled his position on the boycott of provincial ministries and passed a fresh resolution in favor of forming ministries. Once again, Nehru had been locked into the position of Congress president under a program that compromised on his key principle of independence. Nehru never resigned from the

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<sup>54</sup> Nehru, *Autobiography*, 203.



presidency, but he refrained from participating in the Congress parliamentary board meetings that negotiated the formation of ministries in eight provinces: Madras, Bombay, Central Provinces, Orissa, Bihar, North-West Frontier Provinces, Assam, and even his home state, the U.P.<sup>55</sup>

Rather than publicly attack the INC, as the left hoped he would, Nehru quietly served his term as president without participation in the provincial ministries of the Congress. The left criticized his complacency, while the right recognized the power of Congress consensus in placating Nehru. The provincial ministries proved to be a rightwing-dominated and semi-loyalist affair that supported policies leading to a surge in British troops in India and China, policies Nehru had fiercely opposed since Madras. Congress ministries in the provinces often attacked and imprisoned leftists of the communist and socialist persuasions, while the inclusion and bolstering of feudal, landholding, and capitalist elites in the ministries further disillusioned Nehru. Nevertheless, he clung to the INC as the premier anti-imperialist platform no matter how far away the Congress moved from the brand of anti-imperialism he sought to implement. His Congress party loyalty and faith in unity at all costs remained as consistent as his anti-imperialism since the 1920s. By the fall of 1937, Subhas Chandra Bose had been elected president of the INC for 1938 and Nehru was released from another painful year of compromising his internationalist and nationalist principles for the unity of the Congress. Pushed by Gandhi and the Working Committee to serve as the general secretary of the INC – which resolved to support the acceptance of provincial ministries

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<sup>55</sup> “Twenty-eight Months of Congress Rule,” in Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, 323.

against to his own wishes - Nehru declined and opted to travel to Europe and visit his daughter at Oxford instead.

Why would Nehru leave India at a time of Congress success and party building? Historians consider this a moment of “retreat” from Indian politics when “gleefully turning his back on India” Nehru sailed to Europe to escape the Congress. Yet, as this dissertation has argued, Nehru’s political vision and activities straddled two spheres- the world of anti-imperialists struggling against oppression, as well as the local and national politics of India’s anti-colonial struggle against the raj. For Nehru, the distinction between home and away, local and global, India and world was blurred, while the national mission was to be intimately linked to the global struggle against empires. It was not a choice to “retreat” from one to the other, but rather a shift in focus from the national to international terrains, both interconnected in the broader anti-imperialist struggle. In addition, Nehru was a politician who appreciated the INC and its diverse array of members. Rather than openly criticize the provincial ministries, and be the focus of hostility from the left for wavering on the decision, Nehru left the situation. He spent most of the Congress ministry period abroad, a time that lasted for two years until the INC resigned in protest of the British Government’s entry of India into World War II.

### 7.3 Representing India in the World

On the eve of his departure for Europe in June 1938, Nehru made a speech in Lucknow with a simply stated message: “India cannot stand aloof.”<sup>56</sup> He referred to the

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<sup>56</sup> Nehru, speech dated 24 May 1938, *SWJN*, vol. 9, 4.

reclusive nature of the Congress as the world teetered on the brink of another war, one that promised to be more devastating than the Great War. Nehru argued that India must lend its support to anti-fascism. According to Nehru, “We should establish better contacts with foreign countries and more of us should visit them.”<sup>57</sup> This he intended to do personally. For Nehru, India had much to learn from the world, a point he stressed in his election campaigns in India throughout 1936 and 1937. But Nehru’s vision for Indian nationalism also recognized that India must take up an active role among the global anti-imperialist forces at work in the 1930s. This led Nehru to embark on another round of meetings in Europe among socialists and communists. He even scheduled a trip to the Soviet Union in 1938, but could not obtain a visa. And this time, Nehru’s sojourns extended beyond Europe to include Egypt and China. For most of the ministry period, Nehru traveled the world stage and represented India to the international community of anti-imperialists.<sup>58</sup>

On his way to Europe, Nehru stopped in Alexandria to meet Egyptian Wafd Party leader, Nahas Pasha (1879-1965) for the first time for a brief three hours, and the two held subsequent meetings in September (Paris) and October (Cairo).<sup>59</sup> After the first meeting in June, Nehru wrote the Nahas Pasha: “I found that there was so much in common between us and our respective national movements that it would be to the great

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<sup>57</sup> Nehru, speech, 24 May, 4.

<sup>58</sup> His travels began in 1937 when Nehru went to the North West Frontier Province, Assam, Burma, and Malaya. In 1938, Nehru went to Egypt followed by a European tour, then finally to China in 1939.

<sup>59</sup> Nahas Pasha to Nehru, 2 August 1938, trans. from French to English by INC, File G60-1938, AICC Papers.

advantage of both of us to cooperate with each other as far as we can.”<sup>60</sup> Nehru and Nahas Pasha discussed international policies that strengthened anti-imperialism - support for China against Japanese aggression and Abyssinia against Italian expansion, as well as an anti-fascist position against Germany. The two men also developed a program for fostering greater anti-imperialist connections between the INC and Wafd including a several points: a weekly exchange of publications and letters; delegations of the INC to attend the Wafd annual sessions and visa versa; a continued dialogue and coordination of an international anti-imperial policy on the world situation; the facilitation of contacts between Indian and Egyptian youth movements; and maintenance of a personal correspondence between Nehru and Pasha. Although Nahas Pasha could not attend the INC annual session scheduled for early 1939, high-ranking members of the Wafd Party delegation attended.<sup>61</sup>

Nehru arrived in Europe on the brink of another war. His schedule took him to Britain, Spain, France, Germany, and Czechoslovakia. He began in Barcelona in the midst of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), a conflict between the Republican Government and a fascist military under the leadership of General Francisco Franco. It served as a precursor to the Second World War as international aid pour in to the belligerent factions – fascist Germany and Italy aided Franco, while the Soviet Union helped the Republican Government. For Nehru, the heroes of the war were the Soviet Union-backed Republican Government as a stalwart of anti-capitalism-imperialism-

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<sup>60</sup> Nehru to Nahas Pasha, 1 October 1938, G71-1938, AICC Papers.

<sup>61</sup> Cable Nahas Pasha to Nehru, 25 February 1939, G88-1939, AICC Papers.

fascism.<sup>62</sup> From Spain, Nehru traveled to Paris and London, but every engagement reinforced the growing war threat. In London, Nehru had been fitted with a gas mask in case in the event war broke out while he was still in Britain.

Despite the changing landscape of Europe, Nehru clung to a familiar internationalist framework of a world divided into two camps, capitalism-imperialism-fascism on one hand, and its opponents on the other. In all of his encounters in Europe, he could not break from his anti-imperialist logic to see that British capitalist-imperialist interests were not entirely in line with fascist Germany, while Stalin's dictatorship in the Soviet Union hardly differed from the authoritarianism of fascist regimes. The 1930s world was more complex and changing, but Nehru's worldview retained a consistency from the late 1920s. Nehru's tour of Europe included a myriad of public statements and interviews, all of which he used to express India's support for the anti-imperialist and anti-fascist forces in Soviet Russia, Spain, Abyssinia, and China. His loyalties were summed up in a published interview in London: "An anti-imperialist people like the Indians cannot help being anti-fascist, support the Spanish Republic in its struggle against the interventionist, fascist and imperialist powers, and favour the Chinese people in their struggle for independence against the military fascist imperialism of Japan."<sup>63</sup> Add to this his statement a month later on the Soviet Russia as an anti-imperialist partner: "We

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<sup>62</sup> Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, 121-122.

<sup>63</sup> Nehru, interview to the *Daily Worker* (London) printed 29 June 1938, repr. in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta) 6 July 1938, *SWJN*, vol. 9, 30. Nehru's support extended beyond sympathetic words. When he returned to India later in 1938, Nehru helped organize financial aid to Spain and medical units to China to support these anti-imperialist and anti-fascist partners. See Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*.

highly appreciate the foreign policy of Moscow and the support rendered by it to the oppressed people.”<sup>64</sup>

Nehru attracted considerable attention in Europe and he quickly became the internationally recognized voice of India. Many in Britain and France worried about what India might do in the event of another international crisis or war. Key British government officials expressed interest in meeting Nehru and many did. Nehru had long discussions with Labour Party leaders, and he reported back to the Congress that talks revolved around specific conditions and agreements for a not-so-distant future withdrawal of the British from India. Nehru found a more welcoming environment and attitude amongst British policymakers, one vastly different from his last trip in 1936 before the Government of India Act and the provincial ministries.<sup>65</sup> But British authorities were not the only ones interested in Nehru and the INC position on the war danger. Nazi authorities contacted Nehru and invited him to Germany. Nehru remarked in his report to the INC, “I was told that some high German officials were so keen on seeing me and discussing various matters with me, that they were prepared to travel to any part of Germany to do so.”<sup>66</sup> In fact, Nehru’s travels did take him to Munich for several days en route to Czechoslovakia where he planned to meet an old friend and Indian expatriate, A.C.N. Nambiar. But Nehru refused to meet with Nazi officials. If he had ever wavered on this question, the stay in Czechoslovakia strengthened his condemnation of German

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<sup>64</sup> Nehru, interview to *Rude Pravo* (Paris), 31 July 1938, *SWJN*, vol. 9, 92.

<sup>65</sup> Nehru, Note to Working Committee, 1 August 1938, *SWJN* vol. 9, 91-105.

<sup>66</sup> Nehru, Note to Working Committee, 92.

fascism as a bully and aggressor.<sup>67</sup> British and French appeasement of Hitler, in persuading Czechoslovakia to surrender the Sudetenland to Germany in the Munich Pact, further irritated Nehru, but also convinced him that fascism and imperialism were blood brothers.

By the end of his sojourn, however, Nehru began to revise his worldview in relation to his new encounters. Rather than an inevitable conflict between imperialism and anti-imperialism, Nehru's late 1930s worldview recognized the preeminent danger of fascism. Somewhere on a ship in the Arabian Sea returning to India from his European travels, Nehru drafted his post-script for the new 1939 edition of *Glimpses of World History*. He wrote in November 1938, "The growth of fascism during the last five years and its attack on every democratic principle and conception of freedom and civilization have made the defense of democracy the vital question today."<sup>68</sup> Fascism "seeks to crush democracy and freedom and dominate the world" while a "fascist international has grown up which not only carries on open, though undeclared wars, but is always intriguing in various countries and fomenting trouble so as to give it an opportunity to intervene."<sup>69</sup> The world crisis, according to Nehru, was becoming a struggle for political freedoms rather than economic freedoms. He added, "The present world conflict is not between communism and socialism on one hand and fascism on the other. It is between democracy and fascism, and all the real forces of democracy line up and become anti-

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<sup>67</sup> Nehru, "India and the European Crisis," repr. in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta) 15 September 1938, *SWJN*, vol. 9, 130-131.

<sup>68</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, 956.

<sup>69</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 968.

fascists.”<sup>70</sup> Despite this shift from anti-imperialism to anti-fascism, the worldwide protagonists and logic remained consistent with the 1920s: socialists, communists, and nationalists from the colonized world were to tackle the forces of fascism-capitalism-imperialism. The antagonists remained closely aligned to the ones in the first edition of *Glimpses*. On the fascist side of the divide, Germany, Italy, and Japan extended international fascism with the help of imperialist “friends” like Britain and France who “encourage fascist terrorism and the destruction of civilization and decency.”<sup>71</sup> However, the United States stood out in the post-script as an exception to Nehru’s now familiar alignments. For the first time, Nehru began to see the U.S. as a possible ally and protector of political freedoms from rising threat of fascism.

Nehru returned from his trip to India in time for a dramatic showdown in the Congress between the left and right in 1939. Subhas Chandra Bose announced that he planned to run for a second term as president of the INC in 1939. His decision went against the wishes of Gandhi, who had already handpicked a candidate for position. However, unlike Nehru, Bose was willing to challenge Gandhi and the rightwing within the INC, and he moved forward with his candidacy. To further aggravate the situation, Bose ran on a platform that openly called for the Congress left to mobilize against the rightwing. Ultimately, Bose won the INC presidential election, but Gandhi and his Congress allies (among them Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad, and J.B. Kripalani) resigned from the Working Committee in a successful attempt to pressure Bose to withdrawal.

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<sup>70</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 956.

<sup>71</sup> Nehru, *Glimpses*, 970.



Nehru had been caught in the middle, at first trying to broker a compromise between Gandhi and Bose, but ultimately forced to choose whether to support Gandhi in calling for Bose to resign or whether to support Bose and the left. At first, Nehru wavered on the issue and wrote to Bose: “I cannot stomach this kind of politics and I have kept absolutely aloof from them for these many years.”<sup>72</sup> But with Gandhi threatening withdrawal from the Congress and national unity threatened with his departure, Nehru refused to support Bose. In the end, Bose resigned from the Congress and formed a new and more revolutionary front, the Forward Bloc, first working within the INC and later in opposition to it. Retaining his faith in Congress unity, Nehru condemned the Forward Bloc in May 1939: “I consider it improper to weaken the great organization like the Congress by the formation of separate groups. Such a course would not be in the interests of the country.”<sup>73</sup>

Yet, it is too simplistic to characterize the 1939 split as another instance of Nehru’s inability to break with Gandhi and the Congress. Rather one of the key points of contention between Nehru and Bose in 1939 was the international question. Although both were internationalists and leftists, Bose loathed Nehru’s anti-fascist framework for understanding the world and India’s place within it. As we have seen, Nehru refused to see fascist Germany and Italy as potential allies. Simply stated during his trip to Europe: “The struggle in India is essentially and fundamentally an anti-imperialist one. As such, it is also opposed to fascism, which vigorously supports the imperialist philosophy. While

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<sup>72</sup> Nehru to Bose, 4 February 1939, *SWJN*, vol. 9, 483.

<sup>73</sup> Nehru, Speech 21 May 1939 in Kanpur, *SWJN*, Vol. 9, 547.

India is keen on getting out of the imperialist hold and with this aim carries on her struggle, she has no desire to support the expansionist drives of fascist powers merely on account of the manifestations of clashes within the imperialist camp.”<sup>74</sup> When Nehru wrote Bose in February 1939 to resolve their differences, he asked pointedly what his Bengali colleague envisioned for a Congress international policy, an issue to which he attached “great importance, especially at this juncture.”<sup>75</sup> Bose responded with a caustic attack on Nehru’s international position as “nebulous.” Bose added: “Foreign policy is a realistic affair to be determined largely from the point of view of a nation’s self-interest.” Bose further criticized Nehru for championing “lost causes” like anti-fascism, as well as supporting Republican Spain, China, and Abyssinia.<sup>76</sup>

The Nehru and Bose split had clear international dimensions beyond the nationalist politics of left and right within the Congress. Since Nehru could no longer imagine a distinction between his nationalist and internationalist policies, as both were interconnected and interdependent since 1927, he could not accept Bose’s *real politik* arguments about acting internationally only for national self-interest. After his split with Gandhi and the Congress, indeed Bose went on to form the Indian National Army and construct alliances with the Axis powers in the Second World War. For Nehru, Bose’s alliance with Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperialist Japan was anathema to the anti-imperialist and anti-fascist framework for India and the world that he had crafted

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<sup>74</sup> Nehru, “The Tension in Europe,” interview in Prague, repr. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* 31 August 1938, *SWJN*, vol. 9, 119-120.

<sup>75</sup> Nehru to Bose, 4 February 1939, *SWJN*, vol. 9, 483.

<sup>76</sup> Bose to Nehru, 28 March 1939, repr. in Jawaharlal Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1960), 334-335.

since 1927. In the end, Nehru's fundamental internationalist position could not be reconciled with Bose's willingness to ally India with fascism.

A few months later, a disheartened Nehru left India again and embarked on a highly anticipated journey to China, a country that came to occupy a critical place in the Brussels Congress and League, but also in Nehru's geography of anti-imperial resistance. Nehru's itinerary took him first to Chungking to meet General Chiang and KMT leaders, and then he planned to travel northward to meet with Mao Zedong and Chinese Communist Party members in their wartime operations base in Yan'an. Nehru encountered China at a moment of temporary alliances between Chiang's KMT and Mao's Communist Party to collectively resist Japanese invasion. Nehru's first evening in Chungking began with a bang as Japanese air strikes rocked the KMT base. Ultimately, the journey proved too unsafe and Nehru had to cut the trip short and missing his old friend from the League, Madame Sun, as well as his much-desired meeting with Mao.<sup>77</sup> Rather than Mao, Nehru encountered and exchanged ideas with only Chiang and the KMT. To what extent this may have changed the relations between Mao and Nehru, we will never know. He flew out of China on September 5, 1939 two days after Britain declared war on Nazi Germany and the Second World War erupted.

The brief trip to Chungking provided fresh encounters that strengthened Nehru's belief that India and China shared a progressive anti-imperialist mission in the broader international world. Nehru hoped his brief trip would be a symbolic gesture of India's

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<sup>77</sup> Letters between Nehru and Madame Sun expose the disappointment on both sides that the meeting did not take place. See Nehru to Madame Sun, 13 October 1939 and Madame Sun to Nehru, 15 November 1939, Correspondence Files, vol. 95, JN Papers.

goodwill and solidarity with China in its struggle against Japanese imperialism. In a public statement broadcast in China, Nehru delivered a message of hope for “freedom for our dearly-loved countries, for Asia, and for the world.” Nehru added that, “We consider that imperialism, and fascism and the aggression that goes to further them, are evils which must be resisted, whosoever might indulge them. Imperialism does not become less evil because an Asiatic power indulges in it.”<sup>78</sup> Nehru and both Generalism and Madame Chiang maintained a steady correspondence after his trip and throughout the Second World War. Madame Chiang even arranged for a delegation of the All-India Women’s Conference – a department for women within the INC, founded in 1940 – to come to China in 1941. In exchange, the Chiangs made a surprise visit to India in February 1942. On this journey, Madame Chiang reconnected with Nehru and also spoke before the All-India Women’s Conference in Delhi, while General Chiang made an appeal for Indian and Chinese cooperation for the a better future.<sup>79</sup>

As his foreign connections expanded in the 1930s, Nehru constructed Indian nationalism in relation to the world within a similar logic of anti-imperialism formulated through his experiences in the 1920s. The struggle in the 1930s took on new dimensions like anti-fascism, but the cast of international characters in his world geography remained relatively consistent. One might add that Nehru in the 1920s and early 1930s retained a sense of optimism that anti-imperialist and anti-fascist forces would triumph. With the advent of war, however, Nehru began to express deep anxiety and uncertainty about

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<sup>78</sup> Nehru, Speech, Fiche 531 (37), IPI Papers.

<sup>79</sup> Madame Chiang to Nehru upon arrival in Calcutta, 6 February 1942, Correspondence Files, vol. 13, JN Papers.

whether the forces of anti-fascism and anti-imperialism would prevail in the wake of another global conflict. In October 1939, former League colleague, Roger Baldwin, wrote to Nehru and commented on his account of the world situation that he outlined in his postscript of *Glimpses of World History*. “I have read with vivid interest your comments on the United States, with all of which I agree, and your fine chapter on the world trembling on the brink a year ago.” He added, “Now that it is over the brink, we are all in, I expect, for the most devastating transformation in history- with all the risks of coming out not on the side of world federation, disarmament and free trade as the conditions of stable peace, but the imposition of new autocracies.”<sup>80</sup> He also reminded Nehru: “Perhaps you don’t realize what a world figure you are, or how vital is the Indian struggle in American eyes.”<sup>81</sup> Nehru’s rather grim reply to Baldwin in January 1940 revealed his anxieties about the war and India’s future: “It is very gratifying to learn that one is a world figure, but the world grows progressively less worth figuring in. Everything seems to go wrong and all our fine idealisms become tarnished. Still I suppose one must carry on.”<sup>82</sup>

#### 7.4 Conclusions

Although this brief reading offers only a glimpse of Nehru’s activities in the 1930s, it makes a strong case for the continuities of Nehru’s internationalism from the 1920s to the 1930s. As a consequence of encounters and work within the League against

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<sup>80</sup> Baldwin to Nehru, 12 October 1939, Box 7, Folder 30, Baldwin Papers.

<sup>81</sup> Baldwin to Nehru, 11 December 1939, Box 7, Folder 30, Baldwin Papers.

<sup>82</sup> Nehru to Baldwin, 5 January 1940, Box 7, Folder 30, Baldwin Papers.

Imperialism, a geography of anti-imperialism enveloped Nehru into a community that extended beyond the Indian subcontinent and rendered relevant in his everyday politics of resistance places as spatially distant as Jakarta, Berlin, New York, London, Moscow, and Canton. In the late 1920s, Nehru could imagine a world in which India was a member of an international community of anti-imperialist nations, but India's connections to this world were mediated and filtered through the League against Imperialism in Berlin. The British Government also worked to obstruct these connections in the 1920s. Yet, the League as an institution failed Nehru and the Indian National Congress in 1929, despite his successes in pushing forward an independence resolution and demand for India to be free from the British Empire. Nehru continued to engage former comrades from the League in the 1930s, notably Bridgeman and Baldwin, but also came to meet new members of the anti-imperialist world with fresh travels and encounters internationally. This created opportunities not only to expand and revise his construction of India and the world to integrate Africa, but also to address the threat of fascism worldwide. It also placed him in conflict with other leftists like Bose who espoused a radically different internationalism than his own.

The outbreak of the Second World War and the Quit India Movement (1942-1945) ushered in the final stages of the struggle between the Indian National Congress and the British Empire. In wartime, the British introduced another round of repressive measures when the INC protested Britain's decision to declare war for India without consulting the Congress. Once again, Nehru and the upper echelons of the INC were escorted back to prison. Yet, the Second World War had also unleashed the forces of

decolonization, and when Nehru emerged from prison in 1945, he and the INC began negotiating the transfer of power. At midnight on August 15, 1947 Nehru became the first Prime Minister of an independent Indian nation. However, with the dissolution of the British Empire in South Asia and the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, Nehru also witnessed the most traumatic and violent communal upheavals of the postcolonial world. The violence of partition and the continued tensions and border disputes between India and Pakistan would haunt the South Asian subcontinent for the rest of the twentieth- and the early twenty-first centuries. Nevertheless, he had worked prodigiously to heal the country, while at the same time articulating a new voice for an independent India in the international postcolonial world. This process, as this dissertation has demonstrated, began two decades before as Nehru began to construct an Indian nationalism in relation to the anti-imperialist world since the late 1920s.

## EPILOGUE

*I recall ... the conference of the 'League Against Imperialism and Colonialism which was held in Brussels almost thirty years ago. At that conference, many distinguished delegates who are present here today met to discuss their fight for independence. But that was a meeting place thousands of miles away, amidst foreign people, in a foreign country and in a foreign continent.'*<sup>1</sup>

Echoes of the Brussels Congress and League against Imperialism resonated in the meeting halls of the African and Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia (1955). In his opening remarks, conference host, Indonesian President Sukarno, evoked the historical legacy of the Brussels Congress and the League against Imperialism as an important forerunner to the momentous occasion in Bandung.<sup>2</sup> Indonesia's Vice-President, Mohammed Hatta, who met Nehru for the first time at the Brussels Congress, also identified the League against Imperialism as a significant inspiration for the Bandung Conference of 1955.<sup>3</sup> For Prime Minister Nehru, the Bandung Conference had been a highpoint in a lengthy career as the representative of India to the broader international world that began in Brussels in 1927. Like his Indonesian co-organizers, Nehru must have recognized Bandung as part of this longer and richer history of anti-imperialist meetings and networks beginning in the late 1920s that linked India to Asia, Africa, Europe, the Americas, and the Soviet Union.

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<sup>1</sup> Opening Address of President Sukarno, African and Asian Conference (Bandung, Indonesia), April 18, 1955. *Selected Documents of the Bandung Conference*. (New York: Distributed by the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1955).

<sup>2</sup> Sukarno did not attend the Brussels Congress in 1927, but he later joined the League against Imperialism in 1929.

<sup>3</sup> Mohammed Hatta, interviewed by B.R. Nanda, September 1972, interview transcript 121, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) Oral History Collection, NMML, New Delhi, India.



A historical trajectory from Brussels to Bandung, expressed by Sukarno and likely shared by Nehru and others, raises intriguing questions about the lasting consequences of international anti-imperialism from the late colonial and interwar years. More specifically, to what extent did Nehru's internationalism and geography of anti-imperialism born out of the late 1920s and 1930s continue to shape his postcolonial policies and formulations once he became India's Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and architect of the Bandung Conference and Non-alignment? How would his conception of anti-imperialism change once India no longer waged a struggle for independence from the British Empire? These questions warrant much further scholarly research than the scope of this project on Nehru's anti-imperialism during the interwar years, but I would like to briefly explore both the possible opportunities and problems that his ideas born out of the internationalist moment of the late 1920s, and specifically in Brussels and through the League, might have created for India in the changing context of the postcolonial and Cold War world.

India's preeminent position in the postcolonial third world – having attained independence from British rule much earlier than almost all nations of Asia and Africa – offered opportunities for Nehru to emerge as a leading partner and beacon of hope for other anti-imperialists still struggling for independence in the 1950s and beyond. Since Brussels, Nehru envisioned Indian nationalism in relation to the worldwide anti-imperialist struggle. As early as 1927, he saw Indian nationalism linked to a mission to aid other anti-imperial struggles. His foreign policy for India opposed European imperialist ambitions to reclaim colonial territories in Asia after the Second World War.

For example, Nehru restricted Indian airspace from Dutch and French aircraft flying to Indonesia and Indo-China to resurrect colonial rule. Nehru also vocalized support for the Civil Rights movement in the United States, a struggle that he encountered in his conversations in the 1920s with Roger Baldwin of the ACLU and also with Pan-Africanists like W.E.B. DuBois in the 1930s. Even before India attained independence, when Nehru took charge of the foreign relations of the interim government in early 1947, he planned another important forerunner to the Bandung Conference, the Asian Relations Conference from 23 March to 2 April 1947 in Delhi.<sup>4</sup> The platform in Delhi provided Nehru fresh encounters and dialogue over collective solidarity among the key players of his anti-imperial geography, but in the context of a rapidly decolonizing world.

To what extent did Nehru's global geography of anti-imperialism formulated in the 1920s and 1930s later facilitate or hamper his postcolonial partnership-building at platforms like the Asian Relations Conference (1947), Bandung Conference (1955), and others meetings after independence? To be sure, the lynchpins of Nehru's foreign policy agenda during the Cold War and his most coveted allies at Bandung – Egypt, Indonesia, and China – mirrored the critical nodes of his geography of anti-imperialism in the 1920s and 1930s. But rather than the Chiang of China, Hatta of Indonesia, and Pasha of Egypt, Nehru met very different postcolonial counterparts like Chou En Lai, Mao Zedong, Sukarno, and Nasser. To what extent did personalities drive Nehru's 1920s and 1930s worldview, and how did the very different cast of postcolonial actors change his conception of internationalism and his geography of anti-imperialism? In most cases, it

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<sup>4</sup> *Asian Relations, Being a Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March-April, 1947* (New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 1947).

seems that Nehru managed to build similar alliances with his partners against imperialism and also Cold War hegemony. Of course, Nasser and Sukarno were two of the pillars of the Non-aligned movement. An important question is to what extent did Nasser's Pan-Arab agenda complicate Nehru's existing anti-imperialist geography and perceived ties to Egypt? And, to what extent did Nehru's 1920s encounter with Hatta facilitate the amicable relations with Sukarno? Although Nehru had the least contact with Indonesia and Hatta during the League years, he remained well informed of events in the Dutch colony through the League's literature, which may have paved the way for Indian and Indonesian postcolonial solidarity.

In the case of Egypt and Indonesia, prior anti-imperialist experiences appear to have facilitated postcolonial links, but Nehru's ideas about anti-imperialist solidarity with China born out of the 1920s and 1930s proved to be a catastrophe for India after independence. Since the Brussels Congress, Nehru held a belief that India and China shared an historic bond and common anti-imperialist mission to be carried out collaboratively. When the Chinese Communist Party emerged as the victors in the 1949 revolution, Nehru continued to labor under the same assumptions and logic that India and China were "sisters in history" (*Glimpses*) or later in the 1950s, "*Chini-Hindi bhai bhai*."<sup>5</sup> While the Chiangs and the KMT shared Nehru's logic of anti-imperialist solidarity, the Chinese Communist Party and Mao Zedong did not. This led to one of Nehru's greatest foreign policy blunders in 1962. A disputed territorial border between India and China (in present day Arunachal Pradesh) provided impetus for a military

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<sup>5</sup> Following a meeting between Nehru and Chinese leader Chou En Lai in 1954, crowds gathered in the streets of India and chanted this slogan meaning Chinese and Indians are brothers.

attack by the Chinese in September 1962.<sup>6</sup> The aggression was met with little resistance from troops at the Indian border, and for twenty-four hours, it appeared to Nehru and the world that China might swiftly conquer the northern region of India or perhaps worse. Nehru wrote U.S. President Kennedy a distressed letter on November 9, 1962 requesting significant military support to stop China. But as quickly as the crisis erupted, the Chinese withdrew. For Nehru who had imagined – at times collectively with Chiang – an idealized bond between India and China for nearly three decades, the border conflict imploded the strongest element of his anti-imperialist worldview. Historians and biographers agree that the event haunted him until his death two years later and some speculate that he died of a broken heart.<sup>7</sup> Viewed from a broader sweep of history, from the 1920s to the 1960s, Nehru’s failure to recognize China as a threat rather than a partner in the world might be seen as a serious flaw in the Indian leader’s unwillingness or inability to adapt his worldview to the changing conditions of post-independence India, post-revolution China, and the postcolonial world.

The Cold War climate also likely complicated Nehru’s interwar anti-imperialist logic – especially the “organic bond” between anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism. As the world transitioned from the interwar anti-imperialist and anti-fascist alignments to a more polarized struggle between capitalism and communism and the United States and

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<sup>6</sup> Much scholarly debate exists on the causes and implications of the border dispute between China and India. For a sense of the debates, see *The India-China Relationship: What the United States Needs to Know*, ed. by Francine R. Frankel and Harry Harding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); and Chien-Peng Chung, *Domestic Politics, International Bargaining and China’s Territorial Disputes* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example “Foreign Policy: The Nehru Era,” in Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee and Aditya Mukherjee, *India Since Independence* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2008).

Soviet Union, it might seem logical that Nehru would guide India toward the communist connections with one of the key protagonists of his anti-imperialist geography, the Soviet Union. Why did Nehru retain an aloofness from Stalin and Soviet Russia after the Second World War? When and why did his idealized image of the Soviet Union as the bastion of anti-imperialism shift to an image of a country threatening India's national sovereignty? Of course, Nehru's Non-alignment had been a fundamental assertion of the right of India to determine its relationship with the international world free from the chains of either imperialism or the cold war hegemony of the Soviet Union and the United States. It also echoed Nehru's construction of Indian nationalism in relation to the world in the 1920s and 1930s, which envisioned independence as the freedom to encounter and connect to the international community as one chose. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Nehru continued to express in the early years of independence a deep sympathy and admiration for the Soviet Union. The chilled relations between Nehru and the Soviet Union stemmed more from Stalin's antagonism toward India for its Non-aligned position. In fact, Stalin refused to receive an Indian ambassador to the U.S.S.R. for two years, and until his death in 1953 Indo-Soviet relations were contentious. As the Indian ambassador to the Soviet Union K.P.S. Menon (position held 1952-1961) remarked, "All one could do was, to put it bluntly, to wait in patience for Stalin to pass."<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, relations with both of the great communist powers – Soviet Union and China - turned out poorly.

To what extent might a careful reading of the 1920s tensions between Nehru and the Communist –directed League establish a longer and richer history of Nehru, the

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<sup>8</sup> K.S.P. Menon, "India and the Soviet Union," in *Indian Foreign Policy: The Nehru Years*, ed. by B.R.Nanda (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1976),136

Soviet Union and the Cold War? An interesting query might consider the parallels between Stalin's hostility toward independent India and the earlier tensions that escalated between Nehru and the Comintern-directed League in 1929 and 1930. In both 1929 and 1947, Moscow's policies pushed Nehru to take a position in line with international communism. With the League in 1929, Muenzenberg and Chatto, at the insistence of Moscow and Stalin, pressed Nehru to break with the INC consensus and take a more radical stance against capitalism-imperialism in India. In 1947, Nehru experienced tremendous pressure from both the Soviet Union and the United States to relinquish national prerogatives for international ideological imperatives. In both cases, Nehru clung to India's freedom to determine its own course nationally and internationally.

The same question might also apply to the complex relationship between Nehru and the other Cold War power, the United States. As we have seen in this dissertation, Nehru's anti-imperialist worldview cast the United States as the defender of capitalism and by extension imperialism. Through his encounters at Brussels and discussions with Roger Baldwin, Nehru retained a deep skepticism for the U.S. as an "invisible" economic empire. However, as the 1930s came to a close and the Second World War commenced, Nehru considered a revised view of the U.S. as one of the few anti-fascist forces capable of stopping Hitler as seen in his 1938 post-script of *Glimpses*. What sense could Nehru make of the United States after the Second World War and the defeat of the Axis powers? What would Nehru think about President Roosevelt, who also pressured Churchill to give India independence during the Second World War? Would Nehru fall back on his default categorization of the U.S. as the most dangerous capitalist-imperialist threat to the world?

Most historians have characterized his policy toward the U.S. as ambivalent.<sup>9</sup> Nehru's first trip to the U.S. in 1949 further strained foreign relations between the two countries when the personalities of the Indian Prime Minister and President Truman clashed. Indo-American relations would become more complicated when the U.S. Cold War imperatives led to an alliance with Pakistan in 1954.<sup>10</sup> Nehru's recognition of the People's Republic of China in 1950, along with his arguments that the United Nations should welcome China as a member, inflamed American policymakers. Not until the Kennedy administration did relations improve, mainly through economic packages and aid during the Sino-India border dispute in 1962.<sup>11</sup>

On the surface, Nehru's major foreign policy decision to join the British Commonwealth would seem to stand out as a major anomaly in his anti-imperialist internationalism. However, the key consideration for Nehru in his arguments about independence in the 1920s and 1930s had not been the complete severance of a connection with Britain, but rather the freedom to choose the kind of relationship India had with the metropole, as well as the autonomy in deciding the ties India developed with the world outside the empire. With the transfer of power, India became a sovereign republic with the freedom to determine its foreign relations. When Nehru considered membership to the Commonwealth, he negotiated an overhaul on the restructuring of it

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<sup>9</sup> See for example, Andrew Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947-1964* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> Dennis Merrill, *Bread and the Ballot: The United States and India's Economic Development, 1947-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

based on “free and equal” countries cooperating “in pursuit of peace, liberty, and progress.”<sup>12</sup> Nehru also insisted that the Queen of England should not remain the ultimate authority and head of the Commonwealth of nations.<sup>13</sup> In fact, Nehru had been an architect in the remaking of the Commonwealth as an international coalition of independent nations, rather than Dominion States within an empire-state. And with the admittance of India and Nehru’s contributions to a new constitution, the Commonwealth transformed itself from an imperial to international community.

It would be a worthy endeavor to explore Nehru’s contributions in the remaking of the Commonwealth as a process similar to his work as a fundamental architect to the building of internationalist platforms like the League against Imperialism. Nehru’s agency in the making of the League illustrates the ways the movement of individuals, ideas and information through anti-imperialist channels flowed in multiple directions and changed over time. In the formative months of the League against Imperialism, Nehru contributed as much as he learned, a point taken for granted by studies that trace ideas as a linear projection of “European radicalism” outward to colonies like India and leaders like Nehru (Chapter 2). Instead, spaces like the League were sites for the *international and transnational* movement and intersection of ideas, information and models that moved on multiple axes and in unpredictable and shifting directions. However, international institutions were not always spaces free from internal struggles and asymmetrical power relations. In 1929, the Comintern’s financial and political takeover

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<sup>12</sup> Commonwealth document cited in Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, 204.

<sup>13</sup> Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, 204



of the League prevented Nehru and the INC from having a fair and equal voice in the institution (Chapter 4). Were there parallels with the League history and the later story of Nehru's contributions to the remaking of the Commonwealth? And, did Britain's power complicate India's ability to be a "free and equal" member of the Commonwealth?

Lastly, I ask whether Nehru's unwavering faith in internationalist moments of encounter and exchange informed his postcolonial commitment to the United Nations. Nehru held great hopes and aspirations in the late 1920s that the League against Imperialism would be the institutional framework to connect India to an international community of anti-imperialist-minded partners. But he learned hard lessons about the limits of international institutions in 1929 and 1930 when the Comintern captured the movement. Nevertheless despite his break with the League, Nehru retained a belief in the possibilities of internationalist platforms to offer spaces of encounter, exchange, and progress as evidenced in *Glimpses* and his activities and commitments in the 1930s. Nehru likely saw the United Nations as a promising platform to continue the internationalist missions started in the late colonial and interwar period that aspired to create a world of greater stability and equality into the postcolonial and Cold War years.

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Situating Nehru *at home in the world* encourages a rereading of Indian colonial and postcolonial history beyond the frames of the nation. Indian nationalism remained one of the dominant themes in this dissertation, yet it was not the only relevant

framework for Nehru in the colonial or even postcolonial periods. This dissertation asks that we begin to consider new directions for scholarship on Indian colonial history that has come to be dominated by studies of locality, province and nation. Where earlier histories of Nehru and the Indian National Congress have focused on the sub-national dimensions, this study foregrounds the internationalist connections that linked Nehru and the Indian National Congress to anti-imperial politics internationally. The League against Imperialism offered alternative tools, forums and networks for Nehru and the INC, which opened up new possibilities and alignments that transcended imperial, national and colonial boundaries. Participation in the League suggested to Nehru that he envision himself as an actor on the national and international terrains of the colonial and postcolonial world.

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