

RUSSELL AND INDIAN INDEPENDENCE

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At the height of the Sino-Indian border dispute in 1962, Bertrand Russell, as “a lifetime friend of India” (*Unarmed Victory*, p. 88), appealed to Prime Minister Nehru for peace. Yet for the first 75 years of Russell’s life, India had not been an independent, developing state whose non-aligned diplomacy he could (usually) admire, but rather an economically and strategically vital part of the British Empire. Thus Russell’s fraternal bond with India was formed during its protracted struggle against British rule. The central purpose of this article is to reconstruct Russell’s occasionally contorted connection with that historic contest, and it will do so by drawing on a wealth of neglected textual material. More than simply fleshing out a significant but overlooked chapter in Russell’s political life, this assessment of his decades-long association, as participant and observer, with the campaign for Indian independence also strives to capture the complex essence of his thinking on questions of empire generally.

I. INTRODUCTION

Bertrand Russell only visited India very briefly, and not until after it finally obtained independence from Britain.¹ It was entirely in character that he left his mark on Indian soil after

¹ He had contemplated a more extended stay in the country several times but not since the mid-1920s. He first mentioned the possibility in a letter to Colette dated 7 March 1919. Less than a month later the Maharaja of Chhatarpur—one of Russell’s many Indian admirers and the model, incidentally, for the character of Godbole in E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*—expressed his pleasure at “the news of your intended visit” (to BR, 3 April 1919, RA1 710.048164). But these travel plans grew no firmer. A few years later the philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan hoped that Russell would

touching down in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) on his return journey by air from Australia to England in August 1950.² But this imprint was not nearly so indelible as that which, for example, has guided students of Russell in China.³ While never acquainted with British India at first hand, Russell wrote extensively about it, and much of this partially buried textual trove will be displayed in what follows.

Russell also had significant family ties to the Raj. His great-great-grandfather, the first Earl of Minto, was Governor-General from 1807 to 1813, when *de facto* control over much of the subcontinent was still exercised by the British East India Company. Minto's great-grandson and Russell's distant cousin the fourth Earl was himself Viceroy and Governor-General from 1905 to 1910 and a co-sponsor with Lord Morley, the Liberal Secretary of State, of the first, extremely tentative measures of Indian self-government. When a subsequent round of constitutional talks was initiated two decades later, Russell's brother, Frank, the second Earl Russell, was Labour's constructive and reform-minded parliamentary under-secretary to the India Office.⁴ Bertrand Russell, of course, represented neither the colonial administration nor its masters in London. He was usually a scourge of these twin sources of imperial authority, as formidable challenges to Britain's

lecture at Kolkata University during another projected visit to India (18 Jan. 1923, RA3 Rec. Acq. 1027). On his American lecture tour of 1924 Russell told one journalist that he was "eager to go to India". Until doing so, "he could not speak intelligently" about the country—a self-denying ordinance he patently did not go on to heed ("How the World Looks to a Great Mathematician" [1924]).

Citations to interviews with Russell, multiple-signatory publications, and reports of speeches or debates (in which he participated with other speakers) are all listed under RUSSELL, BERTRAND in the Works Cited section. If no author is supplied in the footnote, it can be assumed that the citation is to a work so listed.

² See *Auto.* 3: 28, which also recalls a landing in Mumbai (formerly Bombay)—probably mistakenly, for a contemporary account only quotes Russell's impromptu remarks to journalists in Kolkata and Karachi, Pakistan (see "Nehru, Fittest Man to Solve Asian Problems" [1950]). Moreover, Mumbai was not listed among the ports of call on Russell's BOAC flight to Australia (see RA3 Rec. Acq. 291e). As intimated by the preceding newspaper headline, Russell had emphasized to Kolkata reporters his desire for Indian leadership of a neutral bloc of states. For an earlier recollection of this short stopover, see his discussion of Nehru's foreign policy, "In Search of Peace" (1959), p. 241.

³ See especially *Papers* 15, Pt. III.

⁴ See BARTTRIP, "A Talent to Alienate" (2012), p. 122. Indeed, before he died in March 1931, the perennially volatile Frank had transformed himself into "a reliable, useful, and not easily replaced member of the Labour Government" (WILLIS, "Russell in the Lords" [2002], p. 108).

hold over the subcontinent were mounted by Indian nationalists and their British backers—a diffuse metropolitan fraternity inside which Russell assumed an increasingly prominent role. Even before World War I he favoured concessions to the burgeoning Indian National Congress (founded in 1885). Thereafter he enthusiastically supported the movement's push for more thoroughgoing reforms and vigorously opposed its repression by British Indian authorities. From 1930 until his departure for the United States in 1938, he chaired the India League, “the major lobby in Britain on behalf of Indian nationalism”.⁵

While none of Russell's many books were devoted to the Raj, he published many articles, statements and letters to editors about British rule, as well as addressing the subject in public speeches on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to producing this corpus of unfamiliar texts, Russell often commented on Indian affairs in passing as he tackled such cognate subjects as imperialism, nationalism, industrialism and the shifting rivalries of the great powers. Many of his pronouncements, whether substantial or parenthetical, appeared in obscure periodicals, long since forgotten. Sometimes, however, he was provided a platform by such leading organs of progressive opinion as the *New York Nation* and *The Manchester Guardian*. As a noted political commentator, what Russell had to say about India's colonial status was frequently heard—although the public attention he commanded did not necessarily guarantee a friendly reception for views that could occasionally surprise. In 1944 he would describe himself as “a lifelong friend of Indian freedom”, before proceeding to vent his anger at Gandhi's “Quit India” campaign.⁶ He then wished to defer for the duration of the war the triumphant conclusion of a struggle he had championed for the previous quarter-century.

To imply that Russell's engagement with that struggle represents only a trifling lacuna in his political biography is to forget the heated nature of the debates in which he participated. The fate of British India was undoubtedly “one of the most fiercely contested issues in the interwar period”.⁷ The vital role of India as “a cornerstone of the British system of worldwide economic, military, and political power”⁸

⁵ HOWE, *Anticolonialism in British Politics* (1993), p. 128.

⁶ “My Program for India” (1944), p. 51.

⁷ JUDD, *The Lion and the Tiger* (2004), pp. 138–9.

⁸ BROWN, “India” (1999), p. 421.

should also be stressed. Although this strategic importance was somewhat reduced by the effects of World War I,⁹ the defence of India remained integral to British thinking until the very brink of independence—the achievement of which in 1947 stands by itself as a critical juncture in the contraction of the modern world’s most extensive formal empire. Russell’s connection with a defining episode of British imperial history is of more direct relevance to this study than the preceding historical justifications. Moreover, the nuances and ambiguities of his advocacy for India shed intriguing light on a neglected aspect of his political thought and action, as well as on the domestic opposition to British imperialism as a whole.

II. RUSSELL’S POLITICS AND ETHICS OF EMPIRE

Recalling his childhood at Pembroke Lodge, Russell remembered being “indoctrinated with the creed of the Little Englander” and taught by his paternal grandmother to disapprove of Britain’s imperialist wars. The same reminiscence, however, shrewdly observed that “this creed was never wholly sincere. Even the littlest of Little Englanders rejoiced in England’s prowess.”¹⁰ Since British India was a foremost expression of that “prowess”, one wonders how troubled was the Countess Russell by her country’s despotic sway over the subcontinent. An ardent Home Ruler who befriended Irish Nationalist MPs, she evidently had fewer qualms about the Raj, that other notable blind spot of Victorian liberalism.¹¹ And Russell’s grandmother was selective in her condemnation of British military interventions—roused to fury by the Afghan and Zulu Wars, yet able to excuse the occupation

⁹ In 1913 India absorbed 16% of Britain’s exports and 10% of its overseas investments. This flow of goods (mainly textiles) and capital tailed off after 1918—due to shifting patterns of world trade and the consolidation of Indian manufacturing—but debt service and bullion remittances from the subcontinent continued to enhance Britain’s invisible earnings and boost the stability of the pound (see CAIN AND HOPKINS, *British Imperialism* [1993], pp. 174–7).

¹⁰ “So I Go on Writing Books” (1955); *PfM*, p. 45, and *Papers* 28: 135.

¹¹ See *Auto.* 1: 146, and TOWNSHEND, *Making the Peace* (1993), Chs. 1 and 2, for a subtle illumination of the contrast between the Victorians’ unthinking acceptance of imperial rule by coercion and a deeply internalized view of themselves as essentially peaceful and governable: India (and Ireland) were the “negatives” of this “English image of order”.

of Egypt, “as it was due to Mr. Gladstone, whom she admired”.¹²

By his own later admission, Russell matured into a “liberal imperialist” who could rationalize empire as an essentially benevolent instrument for the transmission of western values and institutions to the non-European world.¹³ He maintained this utilitarian outlook until the Boer War when, according to the autobiographical record, the “mystic illumination” gained from a storied episode at the Whiteheads’ home in February 1901 caused him to embrace anti-imperialism (and pacifism) (*Auto.* 1: 146). David Blitz has argued that Russell’s “conversion” was more gradual and influenced primarily by an intellectual joust with the French philosopher Louis Couturat. Richard Rempel considers Russell’s liberal internationalism incomplete until he became immersed in the tariff reform controversy in 1903.¹⁴ Yet Russell’s spirited defence of free trade can be read less as a wholesale renunciation of empire than a complaint about the debasement of its purpose:

The ideal of a great empire inspired by high purposes, preserving liberty and justice, pacific in its dealings with foreign powers, fulfilling its trust towards subject races—this is an ideal which has inspired many of the best of our nation, and the hope of its realization has formed a part of daily happiness. But the empire for which our admiration is demanded is an empire shorn of the qualities that have most fostered our patriotism. It is to be aggressive, filled with hatred of the foreigner, held together by narrow ties of interest ... aiming everywhere at forcible dominion. And at home, behind the protection of the tariff, trusts will grow up, destroying liberty and corrupting our public life.

(“The Tariff Controversy” [1904]; *Papers* 12: 215)

The emphasis on the domestic pitfalls of empire was classic Little Englandism. Russell’s youthful acceptance of empire had harked back

¹² “My Mental Development” (1944); *Papers* 11: 7.

¹³ This is surely the sense in which Russell described himself thus retrospectively (*Auto.* 1: 136), although the designation “liberal imperialist” also carried a more precise association with a Liberal faction grouped in the 1890s around Gladstone’s successor as leader, Lord Rosebery, and by whom a policy template of empire and domestic social reform was modelled to supplant the outmoded Gladstonianism of Little Englandism and *laissez-faire*. See MATTHEW, *The Liberal Imperialists* (1973).

¹⁴ See BLITZ, “Russell and the Boer War” (1999), and REMPEL, “From Imperialism to Free Trade: Couturat, Halévy and Russell’s First Crusade” (1979).

to his secular godfather, John Stuart Mill, and other disciples of Bentham, and their “dominant concerns ... with cultural diffusion, and with rationalising imperial rule: with good government rather than self-government.”¹⁵ But the moralism he imparted to the tariff reform controversy was more redolent of Richard Cobden and John Bright and their mid-Victorian disciples, who objected to imperial aggrandizement primarily for its strengthening of aristocratic power. By the Edwardian era, the illicit benefits of empire had supposedly been extended to wealthy City interests as well, as the Radical economist J. A. Hobson famously argued in *Imperialism: a Study* (1902). Hobson and other anti-imperial publicists, however, rarely disputed the legitimacy of British dominion over non-white races in India and elsewhere. Both Hobson and E. D. Morel—the latter of whom, especially, Russell greatly admired—were opposed first and foremost to the exploitative and immoral tendencies unleashed by the rapid and predatory phase of expansion upon which the European powers had embarked in the 1880s. The modified Cobdenism of Hobson’s classic critique condemned this New Imperialism for enriching a small clique of finance capitalists to the detriment of society as a whole. Britain’s economy was hampered by chronic underconsumption, so Hobsonian theory went, which could be corrected if capital invested abroad were used instead to increase the purchasing power of urban workers and underwrite social reforms on their behalf. As leader of the Congo Reform Association, Morel was concerned more with the atrocious and devastating impact of imperialism on colonial societies. The “Scramble for Africa” needed to be checked, but it would suffice for the moment that existing colonial possessions be governed in a more enlightened manner.

Implicit in the writing of Hobson, Morel and other anti-imperialists of this pre-war period (including Russell) were notions of liberal trusteeship that became wrapped up in the more subtle *justifications* of empire that emerged after World War I. For example, the senior colonial administrator Lord Lugard argued that British rule over West Africa could fulfil a “dual mandate”. Metropolitan interests could be protected while simultaneously fostering the material and moral progress of colonial societies, as a prelude to their self-government. Imperial authority would be wielded indirectly through

¹⁵ HOWE, p. 32.

native elites. This method had long been applied to the patchwork of mostly small princely states (more than 500) covering much of India—where Lugard had started his career in the military—but which remained outside the framework of the Raj. As the developmental goals of “dual mandate” imperialism remained elusive in the inter-war period, however, bolder conceptions of trusteeship emerged on the Left, notably the idea that colonies should be held in trust internationally.¹⁶ But such arguments were themselves weakened by the proven inadequacies of the international authority that would exercise this responsibility. Russell was a consistent and acerbic critic of the League of Nations, but he nevertheless toyed with the notion of Britain’s crown colonies being transferred to League administration. Revealingly, however, he entertained this possibility less as an anti-imperialist and more as a proponent of appeasement, or rather of its pacifist analogue, “peaceful change”. He saw the uneven distribution of colonial possessions as a dangerous source of envy and therefore tension in international affairs. Britain’s voluntary relinquishment of sovereignty over large tracts of empire would hopefully conciliate the restless “have not” powers, Italy and Germany.¹⁷

By the mid-1930s Russell had already moved some distance beyond trusteeship imperialism, international or otherwise. He was questioning the legitimacy of British rule over India far more searchingly than he had before August 1914. Yet he still retained elements of the liberal imperialism supposedly discarded as early as his “conversion” experience of 1901—particularly, the conception of a civilizational hierarchy, which he had assumed in his early correspondence with Couturat.¹⁸ This position can be understood in terms of the utilitarian sanction for certain types of colonial warfare given in his controversial 1915 essay “The Ethics of War”. For Russell the conquest and settlement of foreign territory was acceptable if an invading power imposed a “higher” civilization on the colonized peoples. Thus were Russell’s ethics of empire entwined with his ethics of war. He continued to

¹⁶ On Lugard, the “dual mandate” theory and indirect rule, and “trusteeship” imperialism more generally, see OWEN, “Critics of Empire in Britain” (1999), pp. 192–7.

¹⁷ See, for example, “How to the Keep the Peace” (1935) and “Has the League a Future?” (1938); *Papers* 21: 56, 519. For discussion of “peaceful change” and Britain’s colonies, see CEADEL, *Semi-Detached Idealists* (2000), pp. 331–3, and *Papers* 21: xxxiv–xxxvi.

¹⁸ See BLITZ, pp. 130–1.

adhere with some tenacity to a conviction in the potential beneficence of imperialism as a medium for propagating civilization. If this was a contrary position for a progressive thinker to espouse, Russell could aver that the Bolshevik Revolution had made the “whole question one on which ... Socialists are apt to have very confused ideas.”¹⁹ In 1927 he elaborated on his “reading of history” to an Indian interviewer:

A foreign culture can never be imparted to another nation except at the point of the sword. The Romans imparted theirs to England and France at the point of the bayonet and we are doing the same in India. It may be unfortunate, yet it has, I see, been the only way hitherto of spreading a culture among an alien people.

(“Bertrand Russell Interviewed” [1927], p. 643)

Almost three decades later, Russell agreed to introduce a series of radio talks on the history of colonization. “It seems to me”, he told a BBC producer with relish, “that a great deal of nonsense has been talked by those who oppose it.”²⁰ This is not to imply that, for Russell, *all* or even *most* wars of colonization had been justified. The potted survey of ancient history in his 1956 broadcast²¹ was replete with examples of unsophisticated or barbaric powers conquering more advanced civilizations—sometimes crushing the host culture, sometimes absorbing it. When Russell had talked in 1915 (with little sentiment or compassion) about the constructive results of spreading civilization by force, he had had in mind the ruthless subjugation of native populations by Europeans in their areas of settlement in North America and Australasia. But such undeniably violent struggles “belong now to the past”, he believed. “What are nowadays called colonial wars do not aim at the complete occupation of a country by a conquering race; they aim only at securing certain governmental and trading advantages.”²² Recent episodes of imperial expansion by military means could be classified as always inexcusable “wars of prestige”.

¹⁹ “The New Economic Policy in Soviet Russia” (1925), p. 283. Russell had been discussing the evident unpopularity of Bolshevik rule in Georgia (whose situation he compared to India’s) and the acceptance of that fact by a visiting British Labour delegation.

²⁰ To Gordon Mosley, 4 May 1956 (RA3 Rec. Acq. 1351); *Papers* 29: 277.

²¹ “The Story of Colonization”; *Papers* 29: 49.

²² “The Ethics of War” (1915); *Papers* 13: 68.

Although in India too the European objective had never been one of “complete occupation”, this did not inhibit Russell from sometimes invoking the advantages bestowed by the Raj on the indigenous society. He did this casually in a 1955 piece referring to Britain’s “great work in India”,²³ and at much greater length in the *Jewish Daily Forward* almost 30 years previously. Using a familiar rhetorical ploy, Russell presented in turn arguments likely to be advanced by an Indian nationalist and a British imperialist. Then, responding to his own question, “Is Indian civilization better than that of the West?”, he answered with a resounding “no”:

[T]he Indian type of civilization involves a much greater amount of human misery than the Western type. If the populations of India were to forget their several religions and their immemorial social customs, to adopt instead the outlook of enlightened Westerners, there would be much more diffused happiness in the country than there is at present. (“Bertrand Russell on India as a Permanent Source of Trouble” [1927])

In addition to rooting out such barbaric practices as *suttee*, Russell credited the British with building a network of roads and railways and with providing rudimentary education and healthcare. He concluded that the impact of British rule had not been “wholly harmful”.²⁴

It should come as no surprise that Russell had no truck with the Gandhian ideas that India had been corrupted by western education and technology, that British institutions could not simply be laid over Indian civilization, and that the stimulation of craft production at the village level was one necessary corrective to such alien influences. Russell grasped the appeal of such thinking to an unfree people for whom “western ideas ... are associated with the hated English.” At the same

²³ “What Power Will Britain Have?” (1955); *Papers* 28: 197.

²⁴ “England’s Duty to India” (1935), p. 69. By contrast, the first wave of indigenous nationalists had started at the turn of the century to emphasize the overwhelmingly injurious impact of ties with Britain. They posited a “drain theory” of India’s chronic socio-economic underdevelopment, pinpointing the repatriation of returns on British investments in India and the burden on native taxpayers of maintaining a foreign army and civil administration (see MOORE, “Imperial India” [1999], pp. 443–4). The assumption that colonial relationships were *inherently* exploitative would become integral to Lenin’s critique, as echoed, for example, by the doctrinaire half-Indian British Marxist, R. Palme Dutt, who considered empire as simply “conquered territory added to the estates of British bourgeoisie for the purpose of large-scale exploitation” (quoted in OWEN, “Critics of Empire”, p. 198).

time, industrialism, while far from an unalloyed good, was akin to “a force of nature: we must accept it and make the best of it.”²⁵ In a summation of Gandhi’s work delivered as a lecture in 1944, Russell readily conceded that the Mahatma had set a powerful moral example in the struggle for Indian independence. Yet his extreme anti-modernism meant that “on intellectual grounds he has to be placed almost as low as he is high morally.”²⁶ Other British champions of Indian nationalist aspirations, especially trade unionists, disliked Gandhi’s social and economic vision, not to mention his civil-disobedience strategy—which was frowned upon as confrontational and politically immature. Indeed, the entire Congress movement was treated with some suspicion as a vehicle for Hindu elites uninterested in the social reconstruction of India along progressive lines.²⁷

Russell’s moral and political support for India’s independence—not to mention the sovereign but partitioned state created in 1947—was clearly never matched by an equivalent regard for its culture or civilization. No Indian literature or art quite enchanted him like the Chinese classics or painting, although he was captivated at one time by the *Gitanjali* of the great Bengali philosopher-poet, Rabindranath Tagore, and used a poem from it as an epigram for a pacifist pamphlet published in 1916.²⁸ And for India’s dominant philosophical tradition Russell had nothing but disdain. In an unusually generous summation of Eastern mysticism broadcast to India in January 1953, he at least accepted that it “expresses one of the great trends of human thought.”²⁹ On this occasion he may simply have wanted to avoid giving offence to a country he had come to prize as a potential broker of disarmament and détente. He was more candid, however, when two months later he spurned an offer from Kingsley Martin to write on Indian philosophy for *The New Statesman*: “I do not wish to say anything”, he told the left-wing weekly’s editor, “as I consider it all completely and utterly worthless, and I make it a general rule to hold my

²⁵ “Russell Opposed to Bolshevism” (1927), p. 61, and “Future Cultural Relations of East and West” (1924), p. 2.

²⁶ “The Medieval Mind of Gandhi” (1952), p. 89.

²⁷ See OWEN, *The British Left and India* (2007), pp. 11, 155–6, and “Critics of Empire”, p. 200.

²⁸ See DASGUPTA, “Russell as a Man of Letters” (1973), p. 5. The pamphlet in question is *The Philosophy of Pacifism*.

²⁹ “Broadcast to India” (1953).

tongue about things that I do not like in India.”³⁰

In the face of this curmudgeonly declaration, Russell had actually professed a certain respect for early Buddhist philosophy. He considered this Indian school to have been commendably rational and “purely phenomenalist”, until its distortion by popular religion—and a distant forerunner, perhaps, of his own neutral monism.³¹ Regarding the creed’s moral dimension, Russell usually placed Buddha higher than Christ “in the matter of virtue” (not to mention wisdom) (*WINC*, p. 14). In 1912 he had had an intriguing encounter with Tagore in Cambridge, at a moment when Russell was toying with the notion—hastily discarded, at Wittgenstein’s prompting—that a union of the mystical and intellectual might somehow be attainable. Tagore praised Russell’s essay “The Essence of Religion” (1912) for urging the subordination of self to the infinite.³² But this commendation made no lasting impact on Russell, who was already recoiling from Wittgenstein’s hostile reaction to the piece, which he did not allow to be reprinted until 1961. Towards the end of his life, he told an Indian correspondent in a more typically dismissive vein that “Tagore’s talk about the infinite is vague nonsense. The sort of language admired by many Indians does not, in fact, mean anything at all.”³³

From some of Russell’s apologetics for British rule, the comparatively low esteem in which he held India’s cultural heritage, or his musings about the primitive “otherness” of its religious or social customs, could Russell be classified as an “orientalist”? For all the sincerity of his anti-imperial commitments, was he fatally tainted by association with empire and therefore unable to discard assumptions about the backwardness of colonial societies and the inherent inferiority of their peoples?³⁴ Yet Russell firmly believed that British India was at root sustained more by a baneful “race pride” than by material

³⁰ 26 March 1953 (RA3 Rec. Acq. 585).

³¹ “Philosophy in India and China” (1923); *Papers* 9: 445.

³² To BR, 13 Oct. 1912; *Auto.* 1: 221.

³³ To N. Chatterji, 26 April 1967; quoted in MONK, *Bertrand Russell: the Spirit of Solitude* (1996), pp. 280–1. On the meeting with Tagore, see *ibid.*, p. 273, and DUTTA AND ROBINSON, eds., *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (1997), pp. 95–6.

³⁴ This argument is famously set forth in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978); for a critical commentary on this classic text as related to British supporters of Indian freedom, see OWEN, *The British Left and India*, pp. 8–9.

incentives.³⁵ He also rejected notions of an “unchanging East” (his words³⁶) and its picturesque mystique. More than most western observers he understood the dynamic potential of Asia and the widespread yearning for its political freedom and social transformation. China was the principal object of his interest and attention, but he detected similar currents in India. While he occasionally lamented the succour that the predominant nationalist tendency extended to superstitious and cruel traditions, he was also encouraged that “modern ideas are increasingly dominating the educated classes. Most of them favour democracy, and a not inconsiderable section advocate some form of Socialism.”³⁷

In fact, Russell sometimes saw progress impeded more by colonial authorities than Indian society. Some historians have concurred. Despite the temptation to view British rule as “the imposition of alien institutions by an aggressive imperial power”, it might be argued that “it was the Indians who wanted such an imposition and the British who questioned both its morality and its practicality.”³⁸ Reformers such as Morley were no less inclined than arch-imperialists like Lord Curzon to judge western standards and practices as incompatible with Indian civilization. Russell saw the British as at fault in this way, for example, in a dispute over the rights of low-caste Hindus. Gandhi had threatened to fast if the famous temple at Guruvayur remained closed to Untouchables. The legislature in the presidency (i.e. province) of Madras (now Chennai) had removed this religious disability, but the Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, blocked the measure on account of its being an issue for the imperial legislative council in Delhi to settle, rather than a regional assembly. Evidently the controversy touched on the delicate matter of how much authority was to be wielded by India’s subordinate legislative bodies. But as Russell complained in the second of two letters on the subject to the *Manchester Guardian*, the Viceroy’s “delaying tactics and spurious argument” also demonstrated the

³⁵ See “Deliver China from Her Bondage” (1925), p. 3, and “Ideas That Have Harmed Mankind” (1946); *UE*, p. 202.

³⁶ “Bertrand Russell on India and the West” (1934).

³⁷ *Ibid.* (for the quotation), and “Nationalism—Is It a Blessing or a Curse?” (1928). Russell did not see Gandhi and his followers as uniquely at fault, for nationalists everywhere tended to endorse “bad old national customs”.

³⁸ EMBREE, “Pledged to India: the Liberal Experiment, 1885–1909” (1987), p. 33.

Indian Government's "antipathy to the cause of social reform".³⁹

Alternatively, but no less favourably, might Russell be treated as an "objectivist" defender of imperialism,⁴⁰ who accepted the ascendancy of western civilization through colonizing processes as an inevitable phase in the development of a global civilization grounded in modern technology? Much as he welcomed the embrace of western influences by indigenous elites, though, Russell did not simply see Indian society as a blank slate ripe for modernization. He was acutely aware that present-day India was the product of rich and ancient civilizations. Furthermore, he did not regard the western impact on India as an unmixed blessing. Afraid that readers of the *Jewish Daily Forward* might think him "very imperialistic", he emphasized the huge gulf separating principle from practice: "[A]ccepting western standards of value, as on the whole I do, the presence of the British in India has been in principle justified, though most of their actions have been unjustifiable." Illiteracy in India may have declined modestly under British rule, but much more education needed to be provided. Industrial development had been stimulated by limited fiscal autonomy, but such measures were still tailored "to suit the trade of Lancashire".⁴¹

When Russell decided in 1942 that the exigencies of war required him to suspend (although certainly not abandon) his backing of Indian nationalist aims, he endeavoured to add a progressive slant to this temporary defence of the status quo by aligning it with long-held and distinctly radical views on world government. "Private imperialism, such as of England in India", must certainly cease. But by the same token, "complete independence", such as Gandhi wanted *immediately*, was simply "not possible among nations involved in modern

³⁹ "The Untouchables in India" (1933); *YF* 143-4.

⁴⁰ The term is from MOMMSEN, *Theories of Imperialism* (1981), pp. 76-9.

⁴¹ "Bertrand Russell on India as a Permanent Source of Trouble" (1927). The latter complaint, frequently aired in Britain and India, appears to have been mistaken, according to CAIN AND HOPKINS, whose influential study sees the lobbyists for industrial Britain gaining far less purchase over imperial policy than the "gentlemanly capitalists" of the City. "When choices had to be made between competing claims, as was increasingly the case, Lancashire took second place to London because preserving textile exports was less important than defending sterling" (p. 198). Russell had made a similar point in a previous commentary on the disputed extension of tariff protection to Indian manufacturers: "English finance has no interest in the conflict, since India's industries use British capital; but English industrialists are rightly alarmed" ("Las dificultades económicas de Gran Bretaña" [1923]).

war” and, in the current situation, would likely lead to Japan conquering the rest of China as well as India. Taking a further step, Russell claimed that “No solution of the problem of empire over backward regions is possible without the creation of an international authority.”⁴² In his lengthiest wartime disquisition on India’s political future, coauthored with his wife, Patricia, Russell kept one eye turned to the possibility of Hindu–Muslim conflict and even made allowance for international interference in the *internal* affairs of a self-governing Indian state:

If there is not to be dangerous chaos, national imperialism will have to be succeeded by an international control. The principle of national independence, if treated as absolute, is anarchic, and makes the prevention of war impossible. The independence of every country should be limited by the duty of obeying the law: externally, by abstaining from aggression; internally, by abstaining from civil war.

(“The International Significance of the Indian Problem” [1943], p. 69)

Although Russell accepted these curbs on the sovereignty of *all* states, his proposed substitution of international for imperial authority was hardly calculated to appeal to Indian nationalists.⁴³ Yet his position was broadly consistent with that which he maintained from World War I until near the end of his life when he aligned himself squarely with the Vietnamese struggle for national liberation. Before the mid-1960s he usually refused to draw a theoretical distinction between the predatory nationalisms of the great powers and legitimate claims to statehood of movements which he often supported politically—including that for Indian independence. Responding, for example, to President Wilson’s call for a right of self-determination for all oppressed nationalities in the aftermath of World War I, a sceptical Russell had “adopted the view that violent self-aggrandizement was

⁴² “Bertrand Russell on India” (1942) and “Gandhi’s Stand Disapproved” (1942); *YF*, pp. 187 and 183, respectively; and “We Can’t Afford Private Empires” (1943).

⁴³ See below, pp. 142–3. In a subsequent article, Russell offered these two justifications for his undoubtedly contentious call for the prevention of *civil* wars by a world government body: “first, civil war may easily spread into international war, as the Spanish civil war nearly did; second, ... by the establishment of fascist tyrannies the aims of international government can be defeated and war made probable” (“My Program for India” [1944], p. 51).

the essence of all nationalism, that today's oppressed can become 'the oppressors of tomorrow'.⁴⁴

When the full extent of Russell's exertions for Indian independence is assessed in detail, any lingering impression of him as an imperialist wolf in sheep's clothing begins to fade. At different times he upbraided a callous colonial administration and its (mainly) Conservative defenders at home, as well as reproaching the Labour Party for its caution and equivocation over India. His prescriptions for India consistently placed him towards the advanced end of the political spectrum. But his stance was not straightforwardly "anti-colonial".

III. REFORM AND REPRESSION: RUSSELL RESPONDS

Some of Russell's earliest observations about British India were made in a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell dated 14 December 1911 (no. 287), in which he applauded the impending reunion of East and West Bengal. The province had been partitioned six years previously by the Conservative Viceroy, Lord Curzon, as part of an ambitious scheme to rationalize and modernize the Raj. Yet Curzon had no desire for the constitutional reform of British rule, as opposed to administrative reorganization coupled with sundry development initiatives. He looked at India through the prism of Britain's global strategic interests.⁴⁵ The partition of Bengal was, in fact, a typically high-handed Curzon measure. Intended to promote governmental efficiency, the policy alienated the province's Hindu population because of East Bengal's Muslim majority. The rising Congress Party accused Curzon of cynically exploiting the fissures of religion and class and launched its first boycott (*swadeshi*) of British goods. But some anti-British agitation turned violent, which sharpened the emerging split between moderate and extremist elements of Congress and triggered a wave of official repression.⁴⁶ The annulment of the partition had nevertheless been announced two days before Russell wrote about it to Ottoline. He was delighted at this resounding defeat for the former Viceroy,

⁴⁴ GREENSPAN, "Bertrand Russell and the End of Nationalism" (1996), p. 360.

⁴⁵ On Curzon's geopolitical outlook and his Indian reforms, see MOORE, "Imperial India", pp. 434-7.

⁴⁶ See AHMED, *The British Labour Party and the Indian Independence Movement* (1987), pp. 3-6.

who had become one of his political *bêtes noires*.⁴⁷ “Poor Curzon is pathetic,” he proclaimed, “longing to denounce but restrained by respect for the King.” Russell also voiced a cautious hope that promises of greater self-government for India were “seriously meant” by the serving Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, and the Liberal Secretary of State for India, Lord Crewe. But this optimism was tempered by a sober assessment of the obstacles to meaningful progress: “I think so long as the police system continues unchanged, with lying and suppression and torture, more sensational reforms are likely to be frustrated.”

A constitutional milestone of sorts had already been reached by the previous Secretary of State and Viceroy, respectively Lords Morley and Minto. Through their Indian Councils Act (1909) the authoritarian structure of the Raj was first dented by increasing Indian representation on the central and provincial legislative councils, and by introducing an elective component. But this legislation hardly approximated responsible government. The franchise remained exceedingly narrow, with separate Muslim electorates being created as well. Moreover, elected Indian officials could easily be relegated to a deliberative role, as enormous discretion was retained by executive councils at the centre and in the provinces. These modest proposals nevertheless generated intense outrage in Conservative Britain and British India.

The Morley–Minto reforms did not herald the collapse of the Raj but did establish a pattern of political concessions stimulating nationalist demands for much more. As in so many respects, World War I proved to be a great accelerator. India’s immense contribution to the imperial war effort fed expectations that this service and sacrifice—at home as well as the front—would be rewarded politically somehow. Wilsonian rhetoric of a war for democracy exerted a similar effect, as it did on other subject nationalities both inside and outside the British Empire. In August 1916 Russell displayed confidence that “a progressive party” would eventually emerge in post-war Britain and that, among other urgent priorities, it “ought to realize that our aim should be to prepare India for complete self-government, by better education, more responsibility, and a removal of the tyranny which

⁴⁷ Referring to Curzon’s implacable anti-Bolshevism ten years later, Russell placed him (and Winston Churchill) among the “fanatical idealists of the older order” (“Prospects of Bolshevik Russia” [1921]; *Papers* 15: 226).

now oppresses all nationalist efforts in that country.”⁴⁸

By January 1917 Russell was regarded by Oxford’s Indian student body as sympathetic enough to be invited to address them on “the Indian problem”,⁴⁹ although it is not known whether he fulfilled this request. Later that year the hopes of Russell and these Indian students received a significant boost from a portentous, if vague, pronouncement to the House of Commons made in August 1917 by Edwin Montagu. The Liberal Secretary of State for India promised that Britain would henceforth foster “the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as part of the British Empire.”⁵⁰

Along with the more hesitant Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, Montagu began preparing legislation to give substance to his parliamentary declaration. The ensuing Government of India Act (1919) went significantly further than the Morley–Minto reforms. A dyarchic system of government was created in the provinces—with ministers answerable to elected representatives controlling education, health and public works, while finance and security were reserved to British officialdom. Discrete minority representation was again embedded in the revised electoral arrangements—to the dismay of Congress, which did not wish to see India’s freedom achieved at the expense of its unity. Although the Lucknow Pact (1916) had temporarily established a basis for political cooperation between Congress and the Muslim League under Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the struggle against British rule ultimately generated more powerful centrifugal currents.⁵¹

The Montagu–Chelmsford reforms changed little at the administrative centre of British India, where the Viceroy and his council

⁴⁸ “British Politics” (1916); *Papers* 13: 439. More than a year previously, Russell seems to have devoted an entire article to India, which his friend and research assistant Irene Cooper Willis then tried without success to place with London’s *Asiatic Quarterly Review* (see Willis to BR, March 1915 [RA1 710.057696]). Unfortunately this text has not survived in manuscript.

⁴⁹ From B. K. Mallik, 7 Jan. 1917 (RA1 710.052574).

⁵⁰ Quoted in JUDD, p. 123.

⁵¹ See especially MOORE, *The Crisis of Indian Unity* (1974). In the early 1920s Gandhi even threw his weight behind the Khilafat movement, while that pan-Islamic protest of Indian Muslims participated in the Congress leader’s campaigns of civil disobedience (see PAGE, *Prelude to Partition* [1982], pp. 25–9). This interlude of Hindu–Muslim unity was central to the radicalization of Congress post-war, but it proved transient and was undermined by sectarian elements of both communities.

surrendered no powers. This was graphically demonstrated by the enactment (also in 1919) of the notorious Rowlatt Acts, over the opposition of *all* elected Indian members on the imperial legislative council.⁵² This was neither the first nor last time in British India that the cajolery of political concessions was accompanied by coercion. In fact, Montagu was fortunate to see any of his plans approved by a post-war Parliament dominated by Conservative politicians more receptive to calls for rooting out Indian subversion than for devolving additional powers to natives of the subcontinent. The latest draconian statutes indefinitely extended wartime restrictions on civil liberties and were received as a bitter blow by Indian nationalists who had dared to applaud the Government of India Act. Yet for their emerging leader, Gandhi (who had only returned to India from South Africa in 1915), these “Black Acts” captured the very essence of the Raj, and he launched a mass civil-disobedience campaign, or *satyagraha*, against the new policy of repression.

This was the context of the bloody massacre of peaceful Indian demonstrators at Amritsar on 13 April 1919. The violence of this incident was especially shocking, but the recourse to strong measures was so commonplace during the last decades of British rule that it is difficult to sustain comfortable “Whiggish” notions of an orderly retreat from the Raj being set in motion by the Montagu Declaration.⁵³ Russell was characteristically indignant at the heavy-handed treatment of Indian protest, which was if anything galvanized by the fateful events at Amritsar.⁵⁴ His ire was most easily stirred by such naked abuses of power—a disposition shared by much of the Left, which also reacted “instinctively and loudly” when civil liberties were at issue in India, as opposed to intricate constitutional proposals or a timetable for their

⁵² AHMED, p. 39.

⁵³ Much modern historiography has actually *not* treated Indian constitutional reform as a simple prelude to the transfer of power, but has emphasized instead how, as late as World War II, Britain was determined to preserve its Indian connection. The landmark political changes of 1909, 1919 and 1935 have been interpreted as “devices to re-establish Empire on surer foundations of Indian alliance rather than the manoeuvres of a beneficent Imperial demolition squad” (BROWN, “India”, pp. 437–9).

⁵⁴ The Rowlatt *satyagraha* continued until just before the legislation was repealed in March 1922, when Gandhi himself was handed a six-year sentence. At the height of the agitation the previous year, Indian jails held some 30,000 political prisoners. Congress, meanwhile, had resolved to boycott elections pending under the Montagu–Chelmsford arrangements (see AHMED, pp. 40–2).

introduction.⁵⁵ By the spring of 1920 Russell felt it unnecessary even to comment on the actions of the British, “since the facts have become too notorious”. He linked the resort to force by authorities in India with a global drift towards reaction in the violent wastelands of the post-war world, instancing as well White Terror in Hungary, the American “red scare”, and British reprisals against Irish republicans.⁵⁶ Similarly, he saw the Indian unrest as part of a general Asian revolt, which might precipitate “another first-class war”⁵⁷ ending with both India and China—backed by Bolshevik Russia or militarist Japan—casting off their western yokes.

IV. BRITISH LABOUR, BRITISH INDIA AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL DEADLOCK

The opposition Labour Party had been in the forefront of protests against the clampdown on Indian “sedition” and had endeavoured in Parliament, albeit forlornly, to make the Montagu–Chelmsford proposals more generous. The Amritsar massacre was vigorously denounced at the annual conference in Scarborough in 1920, where a resolution on Indian self-government was also carried.⁵⁸ Thus Russell had some grounds for anticipating a bolder Indian policy when after the December 1923 general election Labour formed a minority government. Russell appreciated keenly that, without a majority, the new administration’s freedom of action would be seriously hampered, but he nevertheless anticipated a more enlightened handling of foreign and imperial affairs especially.⁵⁹ A conciliatory gesture was made almost immediately with the decision to release Gandhi from imprisonment. Moreover, the incoming Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, was known to sympathize with Indian grievances—albeit in a manner reflecting the limitations as much as the boldness of Labour’s

⁵⁵ OWEN, *The British Left and India*, p. 116.

⁵⁶ “Socialism and Liberal Ideals” (1920); *Papers* 15: 145.

⁵⁷ “How to Secure World-Peace” (1924).

⁵⁸ See AHMED, pp. 42–3. Although outrage over Amritsar extended well beyond the Labour Party, it is worth noting that Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer, the officer who had ordered the (Indian) troops to open fire, enjoyed considerable popular, political and military support (see SAYER, “British Reaction to the Amritsar Massacre, 1919–1920” [1991], pp. 130–64).

⁵⁹ “Lo que puede y lo que no puede hacer un gobierno laborista” (1924).

thinking.⁶⁰ Indeed, the Labour movement as a whole was distinctly ambivalent about empire generally and British India in particular. Many party members and trade unionists even had misgivings about limited self-government for India, let alone complete independence. Unconstitutional methods of protest, whether violent or the peaceful boycotting of British goods, were frowned upon. The achievement of autonomy in stages by legal means inside an imperial framework was more suited to Labour's prudent gradualism, but reform by instalments was resented as patronizing by most Indian nationalists.⁶¹

There was also much unthinking acceptance of empire among trade union leaders preoccupied with unemployment and other domestic problems. Indeed, the textile unions had opposed fiscal autonomy for India in 1919. They were loath to see British livelihoods threatened by restricted access to Indian raw materials or competition from cheap Indian manufactures—although the colonial administration and the nationalist movement had both welcomed this reform (the former because it needed fresh revenue sources in a cash-strapped post-war world, the latter because they wanted to protect Indian industry). Russell generally scorned Lenin's political creed, but on one occasion he appeared to echo the Bolshevik leader's influential theory that the fruits of empire had insulated metropolitan working classes from the effects of capitalist exploitation: "Western Labour cannot obtain full emancipation while it remains an accomplice in the profitable exploitation of the East by those who are its enemies at home."⁶²

Labour's boldest advocates for India (such as future leader George Lansbury, Russell's wartime pacifist colleague Fenner Brockway, and the editor of the London *New Leader* H. N. Brailsford) usually belonged to the party's left-wing affiliate, the Independent Labour Party,

⁶⁰ See HOWE, pp. 45–6.

⁶¹ See GUPTA, "British Labour and the Indian Left" (2002), p. 403.

⁶² "The Chinese Amritsar" (1925), p. 9. Far from embracing Lenin's theory of empire as a temporary stabilizer of advanced capitalism, however, Russell frequently emphasized the nationalistic, if not imperialistic, bent of Bolshevism itself, the impact of which on Russia he audaciously compared to that of the British on India: "In each case a small culturally superior minority is endeavouring to force western development upon a backward community by means of bayonets and political persecution. But the Bolsheviks have the advantage of not being foreigners, and of carrying on, though in a disguised form, the old nationalist and imperialist policies. This makes it possible for them to achieve more in Russia than the British can even attempt in India" ("Russell Opposed to Bolshevism" [1927], p. 51). See also n. 19.

and were often converts from Radical-Liberalism, like Josiah Wedgwood and Russell himself. Shortly after Labour assumed office for the first time, however, Russell also revealed himself receptive to the tactical case for caution over India, “where the Labour Party is inclined to introduce a liberal policy [but] the impatience of the nationalists could bring about in England demands for repression and punitive measures if hasty reforms were put into effect.”⁶³ Yet only a few months later he was exhibiting less patience and lamenting how “very few of the leaders in the Labour Party have concerned themselves with these questions of imperialism and the relation of the Labour Party to non-white labour in the empire outside of Great Britain.”⁶⁴ Indian nationalists and their British allies had been aggrieved when the India Office was offered to Sidney Olivier, a former colonial administrator with Jamaican experience, instead of to Wedgwood, who enjoyed the trust of Congress. Russell complained about Olivier’s lacklustre performance, and while he pressed for “a conference of notables, chiefly Indian, to review the whole situation, not forgetting its international aspects”, the Secretary of State was deaf to such talk.⁶⁵

The Labour Government would even be tainted by the illiberalism that it invariably condemned when in October 1924 Cabinet accepted the Bengal governor’s call for extraordinary measures to quell nationalist protest in that province. Labour’s only constructive initiative was the appointment of an inquiry into the operation of the 1919 Act, but the party was out of office when this committee’s majority reported blandly that the new constitutional machinery was working satisfactorily and providing useful experience of government to Indian politicians.⁶⁶ Russell became for a time a largely silent observer of political speculation about India, although not of the global dimension of the anti-British campaign. Dismayed by the Baldwin administration’s “costly, shameful, and in the end futile” obstruction of Indian (and

⁶³ “Lo que puede y lo que no puede hacer un gobierno laborista” (1924).

⁶⁴ “Democracy and Imperialism” (1924), p. 174.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Wedgwood *was* appointed to the Cabinet-level India Committee, but his Radical instincts were more than counterbalanced by the presence of Lord Chelmsford, the former Viceroy and now First Lord of the Admiralty, who, as Russell noted rather sourly, had “not been hitherto regarded as a supporter of the Labour Party” (“Problemas internos del gobierno laborista” [1924]).

⁶⁶ See BRIDGE AND BRASTED, “The British Labour Party ‘Nabobs’ and Indian Reform” (1989), pp. 399–400.

Chinese) aspirations, he continued to brood about Britain losing its ever-more tenuous grip on the subcontinent through violent international upheaval. “Of course it would be possible to prevent this catastrophe ... by a liberal policy towards India”—but Russell saw no prospect of bold and statesmanlike concessions.⁶⁷

Yet India’s immediate future could not simply be ignored, as the Conservative Secretary of State, Lord Birkenhead, tacitly acknowledged with his appointment in 1927 of a statutory commission headed by Liberal statesman Sir John Simon. Congress was infuriated that only British parliamentarians were invited to participate in this reform inquiry and that the Labour Party had agreed to sit on a blatantly unrepresentative body. Its deliberations were conducted against a backdrop of mounting Indian unrest, culminating in Gandhi’s famous salt-tax protest beginning in March 1930. The Conservative Viceroy, Lord Irwin (later Lord Halifax), appeared much more attuned to anti-British sentiment in India than the politically mixed Simon Commission, which eventually (June 1930) called for fully representative government at the provincial level but no substantive change at the centre of imperial governance in Delhi. Even before Simon and his colleagues reported, Irwin undercut their ground with his October 1929 offer (approved by the recently elected second Labour Government) of Dominion status and a conference of all interested parties to determine the path towards this destination—i.e. of *de facto* independence but with ties to the Crown preserved. Russell approved this approach in a letter to the editor of *The Nation and Athenaeum* co-signed by twenty-one other sympathetic voices.⁶⁸

But Indian hopes were abruptly deflated by the fateful split in the Labour Government occasioned by the financial crisis of August 1931. Although Labour’s more generous vision of an Indo-British partnership would not have satisfied Gandhi’s yearning for an all-India federation controlling its own finances, diplomacy and security, the ensuing formation of a Conservative-dominated National Government handed the direction of Indian policy back to ministers and officials who wished to retain the substance as well as the shadow of imperial control. Gandhi would attend a second Round Table Conference in

⁶⁷ “Deliver China from Her Bondage” (1925), p. 4, and “The Future Development of Asia” (1926).

⁶⁸ “For Peace in India” (1930).

London after being released from imprisonment in a general amnesty of March 1931. But he quickly grew frustrated with the distraction of bargaining with India's minorities after communal disagreements surfaced during the talks. He was also infuriated by British dissembling and left the conference in disgust, only to be arrested almost immediately after returning to India and announcing that Congress intended to resume civil disobedience.⁶⁹

V. RUSSELL AND THE INDIA LEAGUE IN THE 1930S

In 1930 Russell's personal commitment to the Indian struggle deepened when he accepted the chair of the India League, an extra-parliamentary pressure group dedicated to India's independence. Its main purpose was to keep Indian affairs close to the forefront of British public attention. It strove to do so by protesting official repression and pressing for an all-Indian constituent assembly to overcome the constitutional impasse. The India League became the most influential among several competing, institutional expressions of British solidarity with the cause of Indian freedom.⁷⁰ It was transformed under the energetic direction of its secretary, V. K. Krishna Menon (the future Indian statesman), from a small and ineffectual body with ties to the British theosophy movement into the most politically significant bridge between the Indian nationalist leadership and its allies in Britain.⁷¹ Menon put a distinctly socialist stamp on the League, which commended it to Russell among other sympathizers, including Pandit Nehru, independent India's first Prime Minister and already a leading light in Congress.⁷²

⁶⁹ On reaction to the Simon Commission's report, the evolution of Labour's policy, and the political background to the first two Round Table Conferences, see AHMED, Ch. 4, TINKER, pp. 188–95, BRIDGE AND BRASTED, pp. 402–9, and, in much greater detail, MOORE, *The Crisis of Indian Unity*, Chs. 3 and 5.

⁷⁰ See OWEN, *The British Left and India*, Ch. 7: "In the mid-1930s, at least half a dozen significant groupings claimed to represent Congress views in London" (p. 225).

⁷¹ The most detailed account of the League's activities and Menon's leadership is CHAKRAVARTY, *V.K. Krishna Menon and the India League* (1997). The organization was founded as the Commonwealth of India League by the veteran theosophist and Indian "Home Ruler", Annie Besant. The name change occurred in 1930 after a minority led by Besant vainly opposed Menon's call for the movement to align with the recently proclaimed Congress goal of full independence (*purna swaraj*), as opposed to mere Dominion status (see OWEN, *The British Left and India*, pp. 203–4).

⁷² See GUPTA, p. 399, and OWEN, *The British Left and India*, p. 239. In a letter to Nehru

Russell addressed meetings held under League auspices, signed reports, and wrote letters to editors in his capacity as chair. Not for first time, the excesses of British authorities triggered his most forceful interventions. When in January 1932 Gandhi and other Congress leaders were again rounded up, Russell immediately despatched telegrams of protest to Prime Minister MacDonald and Viceroy Willingdon. Barely a month before, he had complained to an American interviewer that the Congress leader had been “a little unreasonable not to do his best to derive something constructive from the MacDonald proposals” (i.e. at the second Round Table Conference).⁷³ By Gandhi’s incarceration, however, and the indiscriminate use of fresh emergency ordinances, Russell complained in an accompanying statement, “the Indian Government [had] revealed itself as a complete autocracy. Very soon the whole country would be under virtual martial law, placing the life and liberty of the people at the mercy of officials and policemen.”⁷⁴ The following month Russell chaired a meeting of protest against Indian repression addressed by Labour’s leader George Lansbury, political theorist and India League president Harold Laski, and editor of *The New Statesman and Nation* Kingsley Martin. Early in 1933 Russell indicated to Arthur Ponsonby, parliamentary leader of the Labour peers, his willingness to call for Gandhi’s release and a general political amnesty in what would have been his maiden speech in the House of Lords.⁷⁵

One of Russell’s most important contributions to the India League was his preface to a damning report compiled by three Labour politicians who had travelled to the subcontinent on the League’s behalf in the summer of 1932. *Condition of India* ([1934]) exhaustively documented the ruthless suppression of political and civil freedoms since the policy of coercion had been revived at the beginning of the year. The authors, Monica Whately, Ellen Wilkinson and Leonard Matters,

dated 30 January 1936, Russell applauded the Congress leader’s “endeavour to connect the Nationalist movement with Socialism” (RA Rec. Acq. 132).

⁷³ “Sees Empire Tie outside Polity” (1931), p. 2.

⁷⁴ “Plea for Mr. Gandhi’s Release” (1932). The two telegrams were printed in full in the same *Manchester Guardian* report. On the scope of this latest (and highly successful) repressive wave, see MOORE, *The Crisis of Indian Unity*, pp. 250–1. Almost 40,000 arrests for civil disobedience were made from January to March 1932.

⁷⁵ 27 Jan. 1933 (RA1 710.054442). Russell never delivered the speech; another four years elapsed before he finally addressed the Lords—to rail against British rearmament plans (*Papers* 21: 96).

also drew attention to the miserable plight of Indian labour and the appalling social and economic conditions in the countryside.



Russell at London's Victoria Station, 29 October 1935, waiting to welcome Nehru, with Menon (*far left*), the three authors of *Condition of India* and Horace Alexander, also of the India League (*at front, ahead of unidentified male*). (Seton, *Panditji* [1967], opp. p. 53)

The Indian authorities had been concerned about the visit of the India League delegation, fearing (not without good reason) that it would simply echo for the benefit of British audiences the critical perspectives of Congress. After the delegation returned, public meetings were held across London to publicize its grim findings.⁷⁶ Russell chaired one such event, at Caxton Hall on 26 November 1932, and invited the new parliamentary under-secretary to the India Office, the young Conservative MP R. A. Butler, to a private gathering ahead of this meeting, at the London home of the socialist writer and cartoonist Frank Horrabin (who also sat on the India League's executive). As Russell explained, the League wanted "a few people who are interested in India to hear the Delegates talk of their interesting experiences and to have an opportunity of discussing personally with them the present situation out there."⁷⁷ This offer was rather strange, for it

⁷⁶ See ARORA, *Indian Nationalist Movement in Britain* (1992), p. 36.

⁷⁷ BR to Butler, 8 Nov. 1932 (RA Rec. Acq. 1736). This is one of few letters shedding light on Russell's decade-long association with the India League. The only known exchanges between him and Menon date from the mid-1950s (see *Papers* 28: 463–4). Russell would later tell another correspondent how in the 1930s Menon "did all the work and I merely endorsed his activities"—but he sold himself rather short with

is unlikely that Butler would have heard any praise of Britain's India policy. Perhaps the intention was to influence a junior minister open to the possibility of moderate reform and who would later skilfully pilot the Government of India Bill through the House of Commons.⁷⁸ Yet an India Office annotation on Russell's letter hints not at departmental commitment to constitutional change but, rather, its profound suspicion of anti-colonial political action in Britain: "The public meeting is to be on the 26th ... and any public counterblast should be issued either at it or simultaneously or both. I agree that this private meeting would be no good for counterpropaganda, but it would be useful to have a spy there." Such vigilance was more pronounced and subject to fewer constraints in India. When the delegation's voluminous report was finally published there in 1934, it was immediately proscribed—even though the intelligence officer responsible for this ban admitted that "very many of the allegations are or may be true."⁷⁹

Russell certainly pulled no punches in his prefatory remarks, which highlighted some of the worst abuses before urging the book to be read "by all who are not already convinced that self-government must no longer be refused." Never one to shy from a provocative analogy, Russell noted that while there had been "no lack of interest in the misdeeds of the Nazis in Germany ... [f]ew people in England realise that misdeeds quite as serious are being perpetrated by the British in India."⁸⁰ He drew particular attention to the dreadful prison conditions faced by Indian detainees, to whom *habeas corpus* and other judicial safeguards were routinely denied. This was a complaint to which he returned on several occasions in publicizing the plight of 31 left-wing labour organizers who had been arrested during a "workers and peasants" conference in Meerut in March 1929. They were subsequently indicted on trumped-up charges of conspiring to overthrow the Government of India. Most of these prisoners had been active in the mass strike of Mumbai millworkers the previous year, and their

this recollection (to T. J. S. George, 19 June 1961 [RA2 750]).

⁷⁸ See HOWARD, *RAB* (1987), pp. 62–3. Butler was in possession of the same office of state as Russell's brother at the time of his death in 1931.

⁷⁹ Quoted in GUPTA, p. 396.

⁸⁰ *Condition of India*, p. xiii. Russell's recourse to such rhetoric was not unprecedented; he had already asked whether "the unpleasantness of life in Germany under Nazi oppression ... is so very different from life in India under the empire-building proto-types of Hitler's disciples" ("Ideals of Fascism" [1933]).

numbers included three British nationals—Lester Hutchinson, Philip Spratt and Benjamin Bradley—the last two of whom were members of the Communist Party and operatives of the Comintern.⁸¹

Although the threat was not quite phantom in this instance, British Indian authorities had been quick to exploit the Bolshevik bogey ever since the introduction of the Rowlatt Acts in 1919. Russell had long engaged in geopolitical musing about a Soviet-backed Asian uprising (e.g. *PIC*, pp. 96–7), and throughout the 1920s he had considered such a challenge to western dominance in China and India as a genuine threat to international order. He had quickly sensed both the appeal of Communist ideals to westernized Asian intellectuals and how Lenin had supplied western Communists with a “formula for cooperation with Sinn Fein or with Egyptian and Indian nationalism” (*PTB*, p. 110). Yet he also appreciated that “to most educated Indians, Bolshevism is another form of Westernism, and therefore another form of the enemy.”⁸² Despite British apprehension about Bolshevik anti-imperialism in Asia (especially in China), Communists had made little headway inside the Indian labour movement, where (according to Russell’s reading of the Meerut conspiracy case)

The accusation of Communism by the prosecution has obscured the issue, as it was intended to do. The real issue is trade unionism. Wages in the jute mills are in general under six shillings a week, while profits have frequently amounted to between 20 per cent and 40 per cent, and sometimes even 100 per cent. The real crime of the Meerut prisoners was that they resisted reduction of these very low wages.

(“The Meerut Case” [1933]; *YF*, p. 145)

The Government of India nevertheless saw something more sinister afoot and was determined to secure convictions.⁸³ The trial dragged on at great expense for three years until some incredibly harsh sentences were handed down early in 1933. One of the Indian defendants was transported for life; Spratt and four of his co-accused were given twelve-year terms, while Bradley and two others received ten years. Despite doubts over the conviction of Hutchinson (raised by Russell

⁸¹ For an excellent summary of the case with an accompanying bibliographical note, see SAVILLE, “The Meerut Trial” (1984).

⁸² “Russia, Asia and the West” (1927).

⁸³ See ARORA, pp. 51–3.

in “The Meerut Case”), the third British accused was among a larger group sentenced to either three or four years of “rigorous imprisonment”. Russell was curious about the meaning of this term and the “location of the ‘penal colony’ to which these men are being sent.... Many of us go to see films about Devil’s Island or chain gangs in the belief that ‘nothing of that sort could go on under British rule’.”⁸⁴ In a further intervention on the prisoners’ behalf, which also tried to drum up support for the India League, Russell made a still more explicit connection between the Meerut case and the iniquities of the Raj generally. He urged British opinion to awaken “to the facts of the situation in India and to the character of British Imperialism.”⁸⁵

Attempts to expose the ill treatment of the Meerut defendants had been continuing since their arrest in 1929. The liberal *Manchester Guardian* had played its part, as Russell acknowledged in one of his letters to its editor (see n. 84). But the leading roles had been taken by the British Communist Party and its allies, along with the Independent Labour Party.⁸⁶ The Trade Union Congress had at first kept its distance from these protests. Although British labour leaders tended to berate the Congress Party for neglecting the needs of the Indian masses, they did not want to see those masses organized by Communist elements whose infiltration of trade unions in Britain they were then fiercely resisting. But British labour gradually came around to the view, eloquently stated by Russell, that fundamental rights rather than the security of the Raj were at issue in the trial. In March 1933 the unions started to work for the release of the Meerut prisoners through the National Joint Council of Labour.⁸⁷ Such lobbying had become more vocal after the verdicts had been read and sentences passed in the New Year, with the India League abetting this campaign as British agents for the Meerut Prisoners Appeal Committee based in Mumbai.⁸⁸ These efforts certainly bore fruit, for about half the pris-

⁸⁴ “Meerut Sentences” (1933); *YF*, pp. 142–3.

⁸⁵ “Indian Prisoners” (1933); *YF*, p. 145.

⁸⁶ SAVILLE, pp. 87–9. See also PENNYBACKER, *From Scottsboro to Munich* (2009), Ch. 4, for extended discussion of the intervention in the case by the Indian-born British Communist, Shapurji Saklatvala, MP for Battersea North from 1924 to 1929.

⁸⁷ GUPTA, pp. 389–90, 397.

⁸⁸ See “Meerut Prisoners” (1933). Other, British-based, Meerut committees had been set up as well, as Russell acknowledged in this statement.

oners were acquitted on appeal in August 1933 and the most punitive sentences commuted to three years' imprisonment.

In addition to upholding the rights of Indian political prisoners and condemning official repression, the India League endeavoured to shape the continuing constitutional debate. Russell himself shared the strong preference of the League (and Congress) for an all-Indian constituent assembly to resolve matters once and for all. But there was no likelihood of the British Government adopting this template. Its negotiators at the second Round Table Conference had retreated towards the narrower recommendations of the despised Simon Commission, i.e. for the termination of provincial dyarchy (combined with token measures of responsible government at the centre). This political course was maintained by the British delegation during a final round of consultations late in 1932. This third Round Table Conference was an even more desultory affair than the second.⁸⁹ With Congress locked in acrimonious non-cooperation struggle with the Raj, and thousands of its leaders and followers in jail, the most authentic voices of Indian nationalism were absent. The sessions were also boycotted by the Labour Party, which since August 1931 had been pushing for Indian reform in opposition. Most rulers of India's princely states had even declined to participate. Determined to preserve their considerable entitlements, these customary allies of the Raj were wary of absorption into any kind of federal structure—even one buttressed by “safeguards” of ultimate British control.

As expected, the ground staked out by the British Government at the second and third Round Table Conferences formed the basis of a white paper, which was tabled in March 1933 and sent for review by a predominantly Conservative joint committee of the Lords and Commons. Shortly after a Government of India Bill was finally introduced in December 1934, Russell published a critique of the legislation. This captured the objections of Indian nationalists and British anti-imperialists to a measure that fell “far short of complete self-government for India”. The promise of provincial autonomy was welcome if long overdue, but the constitutional arrangements at the centre of the proposed federation paid little more than lip service to notions of responsible government. Although a central legislative body was to be elected (with the same sort of narrow and complex franchise operative in the

⁸⁹ See MOORE, *The Crisis of Indian Unity*, pp. 284–8.

provinces), the Viceroy was free to dissolve it on a whim, veto its legislation and even prohibit its debate of sensitive subjects. Moreover, the Viceroy could ignore ministerial advice and remained solely in charge of India's foreign policy and defence. In short,

The powers reserved to the Governor-General are so great that the Legislature and the responsible ministry could have real power only if the British shrank from a conflict with them. Occasions for conflict would be many, and if the Governor-General were to use his reserved powers he would precipitate a constitutional struggle which would nullify any good that might have resulted from the grant of partial self-government. ("England's Duty to India" [1935], p. 70)

There was another source of opposition to the bill, quite different but equally if not more potent than that of disgruntled Labour parliamentarians or Indian nationalists. The joint committee's report had been rejected not only by its four Labour members but also by five Conservatives. Tory diehards led by Churchill had been simmering over India ever since Lord Irwin's pronouncement in favour of Dominion status, and they were now preparing for battle to preserve the status quo. Russell appreciated the perplexities of the parliamentary situation and could reason that, however inadequate, the government measure was probably "the best which has any chance of being accepted by the present House of Commons"—where the Conservative Right stood ready to pounce if Prime Minister Baldwin "offered much more to India" (*ibid.*).

Russell, for one, would have tolerated nearly all objectionable provisions if their reappraisal a few years hence had been guaranteed. In so doing he was anticipating one of many amendments unsuccessfully pressed by the Labour Party, which badly wanted provision for the *eventual* transfer of powers still reserved to the Viceroy.⁹⁰ In August 1935 the bill passed into law substantively unchanged, over the determined resistance of the Tory rebels and the constructive objections raised by the official opposition (although as Russell shrewdly observed, there were many on the Labour benches "to whom the White Paper seems to go nearly far enough"). One aspect of the legislation that Russell simply could not stomach, however, was its reinforcement

⁹⁰ See AHMED, p. 168.

of “anachronistic powers” enjoyed by India’s unaccountable princely rulers, who would be entitled to fill a third of all seats in the central legislature with their own appointees.⁹¹ As Russell had bluntly queried in an earlier article: “What should we think of a proposal that the Governors of Crown Colonies should appoint a third of the House of Commons?”⁹²

Notwithstanding the generous terms of their admission to the federation, the “Rajahs” refused to join it after the new Government of India Act took effect. Many of these petty potentates had serious qualms about relinquishing *any* of their rights and privileges. This obstructionism was hardly a portent for the success of reforms almost a decade in gestation, since the princes were the Raj’s most reliable partners. Nationalist opponents of British rule were, if anything, even more dissatisfied with the new constitution. Yet Congress ultimately participated in the provincial elections of 1937, performing spectacularly well except in seats reserved for Muslim voters. After these electoral triumphs Congress hesitated at first to accept office without assurances of non-interference from the provincial governors. No explicit guarantees were ever obtained, but Congress still formed ministries in seven of eleven Indian provinces, where responsible government worked quite smoothly in the pre-war years. A nationalist movement more versed in non-cooperation now entered a phase of limited, constructive engagement with the Raj.⁹³ This albeit temporary sea-change in strategy was also affected by other developments—the suspension of civil disobedience in 1934 and an easing of governmental repression. The ensuing quiescence in Anglo-Indian affairs was also reflected in Russell’s virtual silence on the subject from the mid-1930s until almost three years into World War II.⁹⁴

Yet it would be naive to presume that India had started to move in orderly fashion towards full self-government. Not only the Indian

⁹¹ “England’s Duty to India” (1935), p. 70.

⁹² “Bertrand Russell on India and the West” (1934).

⁹³ On the (partial) implementation of the 1935 legislation before World War II, see AHMED, Ch. 6.

⁹⁴ Although he did include a few asides on British India in *Which Way to Peace?* (1936) and *Power* (1938); spoke on the independence struggle to the Oxford Majlis in February 1938 (*Papers* 21: 576); and, in the United States, composed a lengthy passage on India for an unpublished manuscript entitled “The Decline of the British Empire” (c.1938–39).

princes, but also Congress—which balked at the massive discretion retained by the Crown—rejected the dyarchic structure of *federal* governance. Many Indian Muslims disliked the centralized model of federation, even if it was not yet functional, while the political successes of Congress generated anxiety “at the prospect of the British Raj being replaced by what they feared would turn out to be a Hindu Raj.”⁹⁵ From an official British perspective, the 1935 Act was “never intended as the first stage in the dissolution of the British Empire. On the contrary, it was meant to direct potentially destabilising forces into channels which would permit the maintenance of the strategic and economic substance of the imperial connection.”⁹⁶ The upholders of a tight Anglo-Indian bond anticipated the nationalist movement being stalled and its “all-Indian” pretensions exposed by a failure in office to satisfy competing sectional or communal claims. They also expected to control the pace and timing of further concessions and to dominate any quasi-independent state.

VI. QUITTING INDIA VERSUS WINNING THE WAR

All calculations concerning India’s future were rudely upset by the outbreak of war in September 1939 or, more accurately, by Viceroy Linlithgow’s unilateral decision to embroil India in what was at first a European conflict. This pronouncement was made without consulting any Indian politicians and served as a high-handed reminder of where real power in the subcontinent still resided. Yet this imprudent and peremptory action also attested to the powerful hold that protecting India and its reservoir of military manpower still exerted on British strategy (which Russell understood all too well). If the colonial administration had demonstrated greater tact at the outset, a formula for assisting the war effort might have been accepted by the many Indian nationalists who possessed strong anti-fascist inclinations—including Nehru most notably.⁹⁷ But the Congress ministries controlling a majority of Indian provinces simply resigned *en masse*. Almost a year later Linlithgow attempted to break the political deadlock and neutralize simmering unrest with his August Offer. These proposals included a

⁹⁵ JUDD, p. 149.

⁹⁶ OWEN, “War and Britain’s Political Crisis in India” (1993), p. 108.

⁹⁷ See JUDD, p. 152.

guarantee of Dominion status *after* the war and invited Indian representatives to sit on the Viceroy's expanded executive council, as well as on a new body to advise on the current emergency. But these promises failed to satisfy nationalist demands for complete independence and the creation of a provisional government without delay. Once again Congress moved towards unyielding obstruction of British rule. Gandhi coordinated renewed civil disobedience, which landed some 14,000 protesters in jail by mid-1941—including such high-profile leaders as Nehru and 32 ministers and seven premiers from the provinces in which Congress had held power.⁹⁸

Russell commented only in passing on these developments. In a dramatic public renunciation of his own pacifism, published in *The New York Times* in January 1941, he explained that one justification for his earlier position had been a fear that war would lead to the permanent entrenchment of military dictatorship. Yet he had been reassured by the “admirable discretion” with which Britain had so far used the sweeping powers at its disposal—“except in India”, where he deplored “the short-sighted illiberality of British policy”.⁹⁹ At this stage he remained angry about the colonial administration's predictable recourse to coercion. Yet the growing crisis of authority in wartime India, together with the military gains of the Japanese, soon placed Russell in an awkward position. Like other long-standing friends of India, he found his sympathies strangely muted by the more urgent priority of winning the war. The crux of his modified stance was revealed in January 1942 by a concise expression of hope that “justice will be done towards India *at the end of the present war*.”¹⁰⁰ Two months later Labour's Sir Stafford Cripps (a freshly minted Cabinet minister of impeccable pro-Indian credentials) was dispatched on his ill-fated quest for agreement with Indian leaders. His proposals were similar to those in the 1940 August Offer—i.e. he promised independence after the war, combined with “opt-out” entitlements for India's Muslim majority provinces. Cripps also favoured a more thoroughgoing “Indianization” of the Viceroy's executive council. The promised concessions tempted some Congress leaders but ultimately met the same

⁹⁸ On the collapse of the 1935 constitution, the abortive August Offer, and the return to repression, see, for example, ARORA, pp. 85–96.

⁹⁹ “Long-Time Advocate of Peace Approves Present War” (1941); *YF*, pp. 179, 182.

¹⁰⁰ “Messages for India Independence Day” (1942; author's italics).

fate as Linlithgow's.¹⁰¹ In order to break the negotiating impasse, Russell would have been more generous than the visiting British delegation. But he still felt that the nationalist leadership had made a serious "mistake in rejecting Cripps's offer". The heart of the matter was not intransigent British imperialism, he believed, but rampant Japanese militarism:

If the Japanese are defeated, Indian freedom will certainly follow, however reluctant British imperialists may be to admit this; but, if the Japanese win, India will suffer a slavery far worse than subjection to England. It is therefore to the interest of India to cooperate in the war effort in spite of dissatisfaction with British policy.

("To End the Deadlock in India" [1942], p. 339)

These thoughts appeared in print some two months before Congress, at Gandhi's prompting, passed its provocative "Quit India" resolution and ramped up non-cooperation. Hundreds more Congress leaders were arrested and imprisoned, which sparked violent protests, acts of sabotage and harsh reprisals. Although Russell had denounced official repression in the past, he now reserved his harshest words for Gandhi's latest *satyagraha*. This stratagem was "likely to assist India's enslavement", he protested in the *New York Times*: "Whoever supports this movement is no friend of either India or China." These were strong words from a former chair of the India League, although Russell was careful to put on record his desire for India's "complete independence" after the war, along with such immediate concessions as military exigencies allowed.¹⁰² But he ruled out changes to the command structure of the Indian army—a major stumbling block in the Cripps negotiations, although the head of the British mission had been more amenable than either his Cabinet colleagues or the Viceroy to *some* Indian say on matters of defence. Russell could "fully understand how galling to Indian feelings British military control must be." Yet he also appreciated how British inflexibility on this point had been heightened by Japan's rapid conquest of other British, French and Dutch colonies in Asia.

¹⁰¹ For a detailed account of the doomed Cripps mission (including its bearing on the Labour minister's intense political rivalry with Churchill), see CLARKE, *The Cripps Version* (2002), pp. 276–370.

¹⁰² "Gandhi's Stand Disapproved" (1942); *YF*, p. 183.

After jettisoning the pacifism he had professed for most of 1930s, Russell would brook no obstacles to an Allied victory. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Nation*, he insisted that “the Indian difficulty must be handled in the way most likely to help in winning the war.” He frequently reiterated this point, and that forming a national provisional government before hostilities ended would only “bring that much closer the victory of the Axis and cause the loss of not only India’s freedom but everyone else’s as well.” Every political move in India must be assessed “with regard to its effect upon the conduct of the war”, he avowed in a public debate in New York in October 1942.¹⁰³ Addressing the editor of *Time* in print a few days previously, Russell had again expressed his conviction that Congress demands were badly mistimed and that only anarchy would ensue from transferring power “to a professedly representative collection of Indians hastily assembled in the middle of a war, and bitterly at odds among themselves on many important questions.”¹⁰⁴ In November 1942 he reminded a Philadelphia audience that Gandhi himself had predicted as much in turning down the Cripps offer. He quoted the Indian leader’s call for his country to be left “to God and Anarchy”, along with his admission that rival Indian parties might indeed “fight like dogs”.¹⁰⁵ Unlike Russell, Gandhi was not at all concerned with the organization of national defence, believing that a British withdrawal would actually make invasion by Japan *less* likely.¹⁰⁶ He favoured disbanding the Indian army on pacifist grounds and wanted Japanese soldiers to be met by passive resistance if necessary.

Russell had nothing but contempt for this position, quite possibly because Gandhi’s advice resembled so closely that which he had himself proffered in *Which Way to Peace?* (1936). Although Russell’s book had made a programmatic case for unilateral disarmament by national governments and non-resistance by individual citizens, the realities of

¹⁰³ “Free India Now?” (1942). Henry Polak, legal advisor to Gandhi in his South African days, seconded Russell in this debate, while Norman Thomas, leader of the Socialist Party of America, joined Anup Singh, editor of the *New York* monthly *India To-day*, in affirmatively answering the question, “Should India Be Free Now?”

¹⁰⁴ “Philosopher’s Hope” (1942), p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ “India Must Be Free, But Not Now” (1942), p. 1. See also “Americans and the Indian Problem” (1942). For Gandhi’s statement, see R. GANDHI, *Mohandas* (2006), p. 480.

¹⁰⁶ See BROWN, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope* (1998), p. 336.

Axis aggression had persuaded him that “Absolute pacifism as a method of gaining your ends, is subject to very severe limitations.... The Japanese, if they conquered India, would make short work of any movement of non-cooperation on the part of Gandhi’s followers.”¹⁰⁷ Russell grew disdainful of Congress, which “seems to agree with Gandhi when he says, ‘I see no difference between the Fascist or Nazi Powers and the Allies’. And not a few sympathize with Japan as an Asiatic Power.”¹⁰⁸ Congress had long been suspected on the British Left of being captive to India’s landlords and capitalists, and its wartime rejection of anti-fascist solidarity only added weight to such critiques. Although hitherto supportive of the party, Russell too began to highlight its reactionary and elitist tendencies. In February 1943 he was reported as telling a Rhode Island audience that “Congress belongs to Indian industrialists ‘who represent our isolationist faction in America and want to do business with the Japanese’. Gandhi’s backers are, many of them, actuated by ‘other than commendable motives’.”¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, Russell appears to have been thinking here (and elsewhere for that matter) only of the Gandhian opposition to British rule. He never seems to have discussed the *military* challenge to Britain mounted by the Indian National Army. Formed by Indian prisoners of war with Japanese sanction in 1942, this fighting force was eventually led by Subhas Chandra Bose, the dissident Congress leader who had escaped from British India early in 1941. After finding refuge in Berlin, Bose secured Nazi backing for an anti-British propaganda offensive, which he spearheaded until returning to southeast Asia in 1943 under the protection of Germany and Japan.¹¹⁰

Russell’s retreat from pacifism is certainly integral to understanding his attacks on Gandhi. But his analysis of Indian problems was primarily targeted at American isolationists and liberal anti-imperialists who believed that the United States had been dragged into a war to

¹⁰⁷ “The Future of Pacifism” (1943), pp. 7–8.

¹⁰⁸ “The International Significance of the Indian Problem” (1943), p. 66. Gandhi’s comments had appeared in an interview in his own weekly journal, *Harijan*, 14 June 1942; *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* 86: 187.

¹⁰⁹ “Russell Opposes Freeing India Now” (1943).

¹¹⁰ Although Hitler had opposed Indian independence on racial grounds and greatly admired the Raj as an epitome of “Aryan achievement”, he also toyed with the idea of invading India—until the Wehrmacht got bogged down on the Eastern Front (see HAYES, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany* [2011]), pp. 39–40; quotation, p. 4).

prop up the British Empire. While insisting that nothing be done at present to undermine Indian security, he tried equally hard to convince American audiences that freedom and justice for Britain's colony were merely to be deferred, not denied. Trying to understand how sinister perceptions of British war aims had become so widespread in the United States, Russell (and on this occasion Patricia) emphasized the powerful (if flawed) historical memory of a nation itself born of struggle. As a result, the very word "empire" tended to trigger "a more immediate and hostile response than any other word signifying social injustice"—notwithstanding the prevalence of exploitation and oppression inside America's borders and, they might have added, a half-century or more of assertiveness beyond them.¹¹¹

Russell was deeply frustrated by an American propensity *always* to place British India policy in the worst possible light and, conversely, "to feel that Gandhi must be in the right since he stands for national independence." He considered the journalist Louis Fischer, a one-time Communist lately turned disciple of Gandhi, as particularly culpable in this regard. In this letter to the *Nation*¹¹² Russell singled out Fischer's polemical criticism of Indian social conditions, and he jostled with him in person a few weeks later during a radio discussion of India broadcast from Washington, DC. He accused Fischer of giving credence to a damaging rumour that the Cripps mission had failed only because the Labour statesman had been ordered by Cabinet to retract an offer exceeding his negotiating authority.¹¹³ Russell was vexed by the spread of this misinformation (although there were shades of truth to it¹¹⁴) and even voiced his displeasure to Cripps personally.¹¹⁵ In reply, the Lord Privy Seal told Russell that he was "quite

¹¹¹ "Americans and the Indian Problem" (1942); *YF*, p. 188.

¹¹² "Bertrand Russell on India" (1942)—a rebuttal of the following article from a previous issue: FISCHER, "Gandhi's Rejected Offer" (1942).

¹¹³ See the published transcript of the Mutual Network's radio discussion: "What about India?" (1942), p. 8, and FISCHER, "Why Cripps Failed" (1942). Almost a decade later Russell recalled his testy on-air exchange with Fischer to Harold Kastner, a young American teacher who had supplied him with information on McCarthyism in Indiana: "Louis Fischer ... told a pack of lies about the British which caused me to lose my temper. After the discussion was over he said to me, 'Lord Russell, I don't understand how you can think ...' I interrupted and said 'No, I don't suppose you can'" (20 Feb. 1952 [RA2 750]).

¹¹⁴ See CLARKE, pp. 315–19.

¹¹⁵ 30 Aug. 1942 (RA1 710.048711).

at liberty to quote me as saying that there is not the slightest justification for saying that I was in any way hampered by any disagreement with the Cabinet or by their withdrawal of any part of the offer.”¹¹⁶ Russell proceeded to do this, not only on American radio, but also in his speech at Philadelphia’s Temple University (see n. 105).

Writing from Little Datchet Farm, Pennsylvania, on 31 January 1943, Russell relayed to Beatrice Webb his disappointment that the Indian diplomacy of Cripps, her nephew, had been rebuffed. He also reported that he had been “speaking and writing to try to overcome anti-English feeling as regards India, which in some quarters is very strong” (*Auto.* 2: 257). Marooned as he was in the United States, Russell had come to regard it as a patriotic duty to combat this influential strand of American opinion. Appearing on a number of public platforms to challenge American or Indian supporters of Congress, he would have liked to engage in these public activities with the formal sanction of his country. Indeed, he had “repeatedly offered his services to the British authorities”, his wife complained to the American author Pearl S. Buck, “but they have not wished to employ him officially in any capacity.”¹¹⁷ Patricia, an authority on Indian affairs in her own right, was replying on Russell’s behalf to the Nobel laureate Buck, who was herself writing in order to clarify the middle ground she had taken in the radio debate with Russell, Fischer and T. A. Raman, London editor of the United Press of India. Perhaps Russell’s anti-war past made him suspect, or the embassy staff thought that he would function more effectively as a freelance propagandist. As Patricia Russell admitted, he was certainly free “to write and say whatever he likes”. Russell tried to take advantage of this latitude and might already have accomplished more, suggested Patricia in the same letter, if American audiences had been more receptive to liberal expatriate viewpoints and less inclined to picture the British as “a nation of fox hunting imperialists”. Nevertheless, from mid-1942 until his return to England in May 1944, he probably published and talked about India more than any other political subject with the exception of the larger but still related matter of post-war international organization.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ 22 Sept. 1942 (RA1 710.048712).

¹¹⁷ 6 Nov. 1942 (RA1 710.047850). See also Buck to BR, 23 Oct. 1942; *Auto.* 2: 254–6.

¹¹⁸ On 6 October 1942 Patricia reported to the editor of New York’s *New Leader*—which Russell judged to have “handled the Indian situation a great deal more intelligently

However much Russell and Patricia lamented the prejudice of the “many Americans [who] believe that England has not changed since George III”, their joint letter to the *Manchester Guardian* (see n. 111) conceded that “there is much in Mr. Churchill’s speeches to confirm this view.” Russell and his wife admitted that the *New Yorker* was perfectly entitled to pinpoint the gulf between the ethos of a “People’s War” and the Prime Minister’s gushing comparison of Malta to “as bright a diamond as shines in the King’s crown”.¹¹⁹ Embarrassing and politically unhelpful though such statements were, Russell was convinced that the days of “old-style imperialism” were now numbered. Churchill had “always been a die-hard imperialist” and by his opposition to the Government of India Bill in the mid-1930s had “proved himself much more Conservative than most Conservatives.”¹²⁰ India’s freedom was “perfectly certain” after the war, Russell predicted boldly in debating the subject for a second time with the staunchly nationalist editor of *India To-day*, Anup Singh: “It doesn’t matter what intentions the Churchill government has.”¹²¹

With hindsight, Russell appears to have too hastily dismissed the Prime Minister as a political anachronism out of step with the bulk of his own party even. Churchill’s room for manoeuvre on India was certainly squeezed by the more progressive elements of his Coalition government, not to mention President Roosevelt’s liberal public diplomacy. Yet, whereas Russell saw the Cripps mission as a serious negotiating gambit, the Prime Minister regarded it as a sop to Ameri-

than any other left-wing paper”—that her husband intended to write about India “for a great many different papers” (RA Rec. Acq. 1715). The political weekly immediately published Russell’s commendation (“Bertrand Russell Hails *New Leader* on India” [1942]).

¹¹⁹ Churchill had been speaking about the siege of Malta to the House of Commons on 8 September 1942. Just over two months later, at the Lord Mayor of London’s banquet, he would issue his more famous and defiant declaration that he had “not become the King’s First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire” (quoted in CLARKE, p. 369).

¹²⁰ “To End the Deadlock in India” (1942), pp. 338, 339. Russell’s characterization of Churchill was somewhat distorted, for just as there were nuances to his own anti-imperialism, the Prime Minister’s devotion to empire had not always been so fierce. Indeed, as a junior Liberal minister before World War I, Churchill was accused of indifference to his responsibilities at the Colonial Office and even chastised as a Little Englander (see TOYE, *Churchill’s Empire* [2010], p. xiii).

¹²¹ “Russell Opposes Freeing India Now” (1943).

can anti-imperialists such as Russell was trying to assuage. “Churchill’s apparent acceptance of the inevitability of India’s achievement of independence was largely a device”, Dennis Judd writes, “disguising a deep-rooted inclination to hold on to India as long as possible. He was soon plotting to undermine and delay the drive towards devolution.”¹²² A more serious charge against him is that his exasperation with the “Quit India” campaign even shaped his government’s muted response to the catastrophic Bengal famine of 1943.¹²³ While this allegation is disputable, Churchill *must* bear ultimate responsibility for the ruthless treatment of a nationalist opposition whose suppression Russell also condoned.

Russell’s wartime writings on India reveal a new sensitivity to the serious communal divisions in Indian politics and society. He clearly understood how such discord had not been eliminated by nationalist struggle against a common enemy. To an American interviewer in 1931, he had described India “as a mixture of numerous languages and races. The only unity it possesses is its hatred of the English. He feared that if the English go, Indian unity will go with it.”¹²⁴ But Russell was usually less candid on a subject made uncomfortable for British friends of India by the stock argument of the Raj’s defenders that Britain’s authoritarian hand alone shielded the subcontinent from internecine sectional strife. By such reticence, Russell also implicitly validated the Congress line that Britain exaggerated or stoked India’s communal quarrels, and that this predominantly Hindu party, as the country’s largest protest organization, spoke with a genuinely *national* voice. When Gandhi had fasted against the proposed creation of a separate electorate for low-caste Hindus in 1932, Russell had signed an India League letter to the *New Statesman* complaining about the

¹²² JUDD, p. 156. See also the argument of CAIN AND HOPKINS (p. 195) that the Prime Minister (abetted by Viceroy Linlithgow) tried “to use the opportunities presented by the war to reassert British paramountcy”. This assessment of the transfer of power emphasizes the shifting financial relationship between Britain and India—which entered the war as a major debtor to the colonial power but emerged from it as its largest sterling creditor. So long as Britain’s stake in India remained partially intact, however, efforts to shore up the Raj continued.

¹²³ See MUKERJEE, *Churchill’s Secret War* (2010).

¹²⁴ “Sees Empire Tie outside Polity” (1931), p. 2. Four years previously Russell had spoken even more pointedly to an audience of American socialists about the “warfare and chaos” likely to spread through India after a sudden British withdrawal (“Russia, Asia and the West” [1927]).

divisiveness of this scheme and the underlying political principle—even though the leader of the depressed classes, Dr. Ambedkar, had welcomed the prospect of independent representation for the community that *he* led.¹²⁵

Even before World War II, India's Muslims had looked askance at Hindu majority rule in those provinces where Congress had been elected to office in 1937. Jinnah had attempted to cooperate with Congress, but the overtures of the Muslim League leader were rebuffed. Henceforth, Jinnah concentrated on fostering Muslim unity under the aegis of the League.¹²⁶ Although his agenda was not yet explicitly separatist, he wanted maximum leverage over any subsequent recasting of the Indian federation. But India's Muslims were politically emboldened by the wider impact of the war, and demands for a Muslim homeland grew louder. After the resumption of non-cooperation by Congress, Britain could not risk alienating India's large Muslim minority—not least because of its historic over-representation in the ranks of the Indian army. In fact, the Muslim League was now assiduously courted by British authorities, even to the point of their acknowledging the rising tide of support for the creation of Pakistan—which virtually nobody inside the Raj wanted.

Russell saw in the divergent Hindu and Muslim conceptions of a post-imperial state a reflection of the larger dilemma of protecting minority rights in a democratic polity—one of the topics explored in his wartime lecture series “The Problems of Democracy”.¹²⁷ Elsewhere, rejecting the unbending unitary nationalism of Congress, he compared India's Muslims to Ulster's Protestants:

If any part of India does not wish to be governed by the Hindu majority, it has a right to independence of the Hindus, as the Hindus have to independence of the British. The Congress leaders insisted that India must be treated as a unit, but the problem is the same as in Ireland, where De

¹²⁵ “On Gandhi's Fast” (1932). The two Indian leaders were in the process of resolving their differences by the Poona Pact, which replaced the principle of separate electoral representation for the depressed classes with the reservation of seats for them from the general electorate.

¹²⁶ See JUDD, pp. 149–50.

¹²⁷ See “The Problem of Minorities” (1942); *BRA* 1: 315–27. The series of which this lecture was a part was presented at the Rand School of Social Science, New York, between October and December 1942.

Valera refuses to admit that the Northern Irish have the same rights against those of the South as those of the South had against the English. (“To End the Deadlock in India” [1942], p. 338)

In this article Russell acknowledged that the rights of secession could only be determined by an Indian constituent assembly and that, moreover, “If civil war resulted, that would be India’s concern and no one else’s” (*ibid.*, p. 340). But Russell (and Patricia in this instance) came to see in deteriorating Hindu–Muslim relations the germ of yet another global conflagration, “setting western against eastern Asia, and ultimately the USSR against Great Britain”.¹²⁸ He therefore began to urge that any post-war international authority be empowered to prevent *civil* wars, as well as wars between states:

It will be necessary to discover some political organization of India which the various parties will accept, and which they will undertake not to resist by civil war. As things stand, it is not easy to imagine such an organization. Mere majority rule will not do, because the Moslems will not consent to be ruled by the Hindu majority, any more than the Irish formerly submitted to the rule of the British majority. The Moslems must be granted independence of the Hindus, and the [Punjabi] Sikhs must be granted independence of the Moslems. We are not arguing as to whether these claims are reasonable; we are saying that they must be conceded if civil war is to be prevented.

(“The International Significance of the Indian Problem” [1943], p. 68)

Russell thought that only by the application of external pressure would Congress and the Muslim League reach agreement. But he insisted that the role of honest but assertive broker be taken on by the Allies acting in unison rather than by the departing imperial power alone: “I think the United Nations could bring the necessary pressure more easily and impartially than the British.”¹²⁹ By calling for Indians to shape their political destiny in conjunction with an embryonic international organization, Russell moved beyond the parameters of official policy. Ideally, a commission of British, American, Soviet and Chinese delegates would be appointed to negotiate with the various Indian parties. Russell even saw this approach as “a first step toward

¹²⁸ “Some Problems of the Post-War World” (1943), p. 300.

¹²⁹ “My Program for India” (1944), p. 53.

the establishment of an inter-Allied authority for deciding questions of common concern; and such an authority, in turn, should be viewed as the nucleus of a future international authority for the preservation of peace.”¹³⁰ Anup Singh was one of Russell’s most persistent Indian critics, and he was unimpressed with this internationalist gloss on the limitation of his country’s right of self-determination. Furthermore, if a Briton was to be invited onto Russell’s commission, “why not an Indian? Why should one party in the dispute and not the other be allowed to sit in judgment on its own deeds?”¹³¹

Even as Russell held the position of Congress to be “unreasonable” and that its civil disobedience, “in so far as it succeeds, helps Japan”, he called for the constitutional deadlock to end. Congress leaders might be released if non-cooperation ceased, he suggested on American radio in October 1942, and “negotiations should be renewed with a view to finding some compromise which will not paralyze the war effort in India, but is acceptable to Indian leaders.”¹³² As the Allies made headway in the Pacific theatre, Russell frequently stated that India’s future need not remain stalled. A conciliatory and forward-looking interview with a United Press correspondent in February 1945 included a bold suggestion that Britain “should state quite unequivocally ... that India should be given independence, at a definite date—after the war against Japan was over—say, twelve months after that.... I sincerely feel and advocate for a ‘new approach’.”¹³³

Yet Russell’s “new approach” started by dusting off the Cripps proposals, and these had been “rejected by every political party in India. Unless British ‘friends of India’ give proof of greater political honesty and understanding than they have hitherto shown”, continued the *Bombay Sentinel*’s editorial complaint, “Indians will refuse to take their political inspiration from them.... Mr. Russell’s attitude in this matter is no different to that of an average Tory or Liberal.”¹³⁴ Notwithstanding the prior failure of Cripps, Russell was concerned—with victory now in sight—that “The resignation with which his Majesty’s

¹³⁰ “Bertrand Russell on India” (1942); *YF*, p. 187.

¹³¹ SINGH, “An Indian Answers Russell” (1942).

¹³² “What about India?” (1942), p. 7.

¹³³ “Bertrand Russell Demands Release of Indian Leaders” (1945).

¹³⁴ “Revival of Cripps Plan Not a Solution”, *Bombay Sentinel*, 7 Feb. 1945; reprinted in PRASAD, ed., *Towards Freedom* (2008), p. 137. This editorial also accused Russell of exhibiting “a lamentable lack of understanding of the Indian political situation.”

Government have accepted this failure has given rise to a widespread suspicion, especially in the United States, that the Cripps offer was made only because of the apparent urgency of the military situation at that time....” As a result, he again called for a “fixed date” for the transfer of power to a provisional Indian Government.¹³⁵

A few days after the appearance of this letter to *The Times*, Russell made the same suggestion once more, on this occasion to the Cambridge Majlis, an organization by whom he might have been considered *persona non grata* only a couple of years previously. There was more in this address to Indian students to restore the slightly tarnished lustre of Russell’s image as a “friend of India”: “It is for Indians themselves to settle their differences”; “The idea that India should become a dominion is futile and quite contrary to her geographical necessity”; “The era of White domination will not last.” There are two extant reports of this speech (both in Indian publications), and the longer version, in the *Bombay Chronicle*, shows that Russell was adamant that political prisoners be liberated only after promising not to hinder the war effort. Moreover, the Mumbai newspaper also quoted Russell’s provocative demand that, if necessary, “an international authority ... should intervene in a civil war in India.”¹³⁶

Aside from the latter statement, however, and a vague reference to “differences in India”, Russell said nothing about the ferociously complex politics and demographics of Indian communalism. This was odd because he had written frankly and penetratingly elsewhere about the prospect (and legitimacy) of partition. In a manuscript from which Russell might have loosely spoken in Cambridge, he again squarely confronted “the problem of Pakistan” and the challenge of applying the “general principle ... that, when a majority in any geographical area desires that area to be an independent governmental unit, it is usually wise to give way to this desire.”¹³⁷ As if the situation had not been tangled enough by the same principle being invoked to claim

¹³⁵ “Future of India” (1945).

¹³⁶ “Promise Freedom to India after War with Japan”, *Bombay Chronicle*, 10 March 1945; reprinted in PRASAD, ed., pp. 228–9. The other published report of the speech appeared as “Bertrand Russell on Indian Freedom”, *The Modern Review*, Kolkata, 77, no. 4 (April 1945): 147. This paragraph draws on the author’s own introduction to another reprint of these texts, published under the *Bombay Chronicle* title in *Russell* 32 (2012): 75–7.

¹³⁷ “The Future in India” (c.1945).

independence from Britain *and* from a Hindu India, there were sizeable Sikh and Hindu populations “opposed to Pakistan” in the Punjab, Bengal and other Muslim majority areas. (Russell did not even mention the large and geographically dispersed Muslim minorities.)

Russell’s final wartime statement about British India contained three proposals and was issued through A. K. Mukerji, secretary of India’s Radical Democratic Party. In addition to calling for Britain to withdraw from India on a prearranged date, Russell wanted India’s leading political prisoners (after their release, again on strict conditions, which finally happened in June 1945) to join a fresh round of constitutional negotiations conducted by Indians alone. If these discussions did not produce a settlement before the British evacuated the subcontinent, then an Allied Commission would oversee talks until agreement was finally reached.¹³⁸ These familiar refrains are less significant than the political affiliation of Russell’s correspondent. The fledgling party to which Mukerji belonged had been formed in 1940 by a dissident pro-war minority of Congress, social democratic as much as anti-fascist. In short, the Radical Democratic Party was exactly the political movement the British Left would have liked to supplant Congress in the affections and loyalties of the Indian masses. Although Congress had been denounced by Russell and others for its anti-war stance and as potential exploiter of Indian workers and peasants, the Radical Democrats commanded virtually no popular support—notwithstanding the enthusiastic patronage of British Labour—as their disastrous showing in post-war Indian elections graphically demonstrated.¹³⁹

VII. EPILOGUE: TO INDEPENDENCE AND BEYOND

In his United Press interview Russell had suggested that “a change in the Government of Britain would be necessary in order to achieve a settlement [in India].”¹⁴⁰ He was cautiously optimistic about the prospect of such a post-war political transformation, having immediately been struck by the leftward shift of British opinion on returning to his

¹³⁸ “Britain Should Evacuate India” (1945).

¹³⁹ See OWEN, *The British Left and India*, pp. 272–6, 283–4.

¹⁴⁰ “Bertrand Russell Demands Release of Indian Leaders” (1945).

native country in June 1944.¹⁴¹ But he took nothing for granted even on the very eve of a general election that did, indeed, bring Labour to power in July 1945 with a huge parliamentary majority.¹⁴² Russell expected much more than a long-delayed resolution of the Indian question to follow from Labour's triumph, which had "given hope, throughout Europe", he declared, "to those Socialists who have remained faithful to democracy."¹⁴³ But so confident was he, evidently, that the path for India now lay outside the British Empire, that his commenting on its affairs abruptly ceased. The mere formation of a Labour Government seems to have provided Russell with the necessary confidence in this regard. Of course, with the wartime alliance fracturing, a new and dangerous nuclear age having dawned already, and Labour initiating bold schemes of social reconstruction, many other demands, both international and domestic, competed for Russell's political attention. Yet his neglect of India at this pivotal pre-independence juncture is striking (not to mention regrettable) given the intensity of his focus on its wartime crisis.

Labour's Indian policy was initially more hesitant than Russell anticipated. No real movement occurred until after India's central and provincial elections held late in 1945 confirmed the resurgent appeal of Congress and the remarkable progress of a Muslim League increasingly committed to the partition of British India. Another British mission was despatched to India (with Cripps again at the helm) in order to smooth the road towards independence, but certainly not to dictate terms. In May 1946 Nehru and Jinnah appeared to accept a three-tiered federation in which the centre would only retain control over diplomacy, defence, national finance and communications. But Congress and the League interpreted these constitutional arrangements differently, and their agreement-in-principle collapsed shortly after the departure of Cripps and his Labour colleagues. Bilateral talks between Nehru and Jinnah later in the year also proved inconclusive, and with negotiations at a stalemate the Labour Government suddenly announced (in February 1947) that Britain would leave India by June 1948 at the latest. This date was pulled even further forward

¹⁴¹ "How War Has Changed the British People" (1944).

¹⁴² See "Hopes and Fears for Tomorrow" (1945), an unpublished text to which Russell introduced significant revisions *after* Labour's electoral victory.

¹⁴³ "What Should Be British Policy towards Russia?" (1945).

by Lord Mountbatten, who was sworn in as the last British Viceroy in March 1947. The King's cousin toyed with the notion of devolving all power to the provinces, which would then have negotiated their terms of entry into a central group or groups. But Nehru strenuously objected to a "Plan Balkan" that boded ill for a sturdy union, and his resistance proved decisive. Mountbatten came to accept the inevitability of partition and secured the adhesion of both Nehru and Jinnah to a revised scheme compelling all provinces either to participate in the existing constituent assembly, or else form another one as a demonstration of separatist intent.¹⁴⁴

While the post-war British Left was united around the *principle* of Indian independence, there was plenty of room for disagreement over the constitutional details, the speed of their implementation and, most portentously, the tragically divisive issue of whether freedom would be gained by one or two states.¹⁴⁵ Although Russell occasionally alluded to Hindu–Muslim differences,¹⁴⁶ he produced no substantive commentary on the backdrop of rising communal discord against which the political discussion of India's future was taking place. When later asked by the BBC's Asian service for a message to mark the tenth anniversary of independence, he preferred to recall the heroic prior struggle against British imperialism.¹⁴⁷ And in *New Hopes for a Changing World* he lauded the post-war Labour Government for liberating India "without the bitterness of violent conflict" (p. 107). Yet, for all that *Britain* had relinquished its colonial authority voluntarily, deadly sectional conflicts were fuelled by the manner of its departure, and this bloodshed exploded uncontrollably after the independence of India and Pakistan was formalized on 15 August 1947.¹⁴⁸

Russell should surely have joined the crucial post-war conversation about partition, if only because this outcome and its appalling

¹⁴⁴For a summary of the movement towards independence and partition under the post-war Labour Government, see JUDD, Ch. 10.

¹⁴⁵See HOWE, pp. 156–7.

¹⁴⁶For example, "Peace or Atomization?" (1945), p. 8.

¹⁴⁷"India, Pakistan and the Commonwealth" (1957).

¹⁴⁸See, for example, HAJARI, *Midnight's Furies* (2015), Chs. 6 and 7. Strictly speaking, the Indian Independence Act (1947) established both new states as Dominions of the British Crown, which Russell (e.g. "We Can't Afford Private Empires" [1943]) had neither expected nor wanted. While complete legislative authority was immediately conferred on their constituent assemblies, *de jure* independence was not secured until the adoption of republican constitutions by India in 1950 and Pakistan in 1956.

aftermath had been made more likely by policies he believed had been warranted by wartime conditions. He appears less delinquent, however, if one surveys the broader anti-imperial canvas which he began to sketch shortly after the war. “In India we have recently shown ourselves willing to grant complete freedom”, he wrote in February 1946. This concession of principle having been made, Russell was concerned less with the final shape of Indian “freedom” than with accelerating decolonization in other parts of “an Empire which is out of proportion to our present strength”. Since other British colonies, “notably in Africa, ... are not ripe for self-government”, Russell revived his inter-war idea of temporarily placing such colonial possessions (not only of Britain, but of all European powers) “under an international authority, presumably the United Nations.”¹⁴⁹

In another broadcast to India, Russell remarked that, after independence, he had “felt it no longer appropriate to meddle with Indian affairs, and my connection with them came to an end.”¹⁵⁰ In reality this “connection” had loosened as soon as he was persuaded that the incoming Labour Government would redeem Britain’s wartime pledges to India. From the vantage point of 1945, however, Russell could look back on three decades of campaigning for Indian freedom, although he had been neither singularly dedicated nor unswervingly loyal to this cause. But even his prolonged withdrawal of support after 1942 was influenced by short-term considerations rather than by a fundamental change of mind. Like other British progressives, Russell had usually approached the Indian question as a Radical–Liberal humanitarian who could view “injustices suffered by Jews in Germany, by ‘kulaks’ in Russia, by nationalists in India, and by coloured people in the United States [as] parts of one global system of tyranny.”¹⁵¹ While he often saw British India in a broader geopolitical framework, his critique of empire writ large remained ambiguous, eclectic even. Stephen Howe has identified four strands of left-wing (or rather Labour) thinking on colonial issues. Russell was certainly not among the “Empire Socialists” who embraced with enthusiasm the imperial idea and its corollary, protectionism. Yet he exhibited elements from each of the other three ideological tendencies. He was, for example, not

¹⁴⁹ “The One Way Out” (1946).

¹⁵⁰ “Broadcast to India” (1953).

¹⁵¹ “Zionism and the Peace Settlement” (1943).

always averse to the concept of trusteeship and the related argument that movement towards self-rule must be *gradual*. At other times he could be classified among those who, as Howe writes, “wanted a more positive commitment to native rights ..., social and economic development, and active preparation for self-government.” And in his most radical guise Russell could present as a “root and branch anti-colonialist”.¹⁵²

Russell found much to commend in post-independence India, as did other erstwhile opponents of the Raj.¹⁵³ With somewhat blinkered eyes, he saw a dynamic new state dedicated to the consolidation of parliamentary democracy and an industrial society absent “the harsh features that have usually been associated with its early stages”.¹⁵⁴ However impressed was Russell by Nehru’s social-democratic stewardship of his fledgling country’s political and economic development, what really redirected his attention to India in the 1950s was its diplomacy of non-alignment. Indeed, he began to set great store by the possibility of Indian mediation of the superpowers’ Cold War stand-off. He even tried to harness India’s neutrality to the celebrated anti-nuclear initiative that blossomed in slightly different form as the Russell–Einstein manifesto. This high esteem for Nehru’s foreign policy lasted for more than a decade until India’s Prime Minister revealed himself and his country susceptible to the same political follies as the imperial state that had controlled it for so long—and of whose rule Russell had earlier been a determined, if occasionally unpredictable, critic for many years.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² HOWE, pp. 47–8.

¹⁵³ See OWEN, *The British Left and India*, p. 295.

¹⁵⁴ “In Search of Peace” (1959), p. 240.

¹⁵⁵ Russell’s shifting view of Nehru’s Cold War statecraft, and his reactions to India’s border disputes with China and Pakistan in the 1960s, are intriguing subjects in their own right, which will be examined in a companion piece to this article.

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