Soviet Influence in British India: Intelligence and Paranoia within Imperial Government in the Interwar Years

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Soviet Influence in British India: Intelligence and Paranoia within Imperial Government in the Interwar Years

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Abstract

The British Empire found itself challenged both at home and abroad following the Allied victory in World War I. Nationalism was burgeoning throughout its colonies, with India as Britain’s greatest concern. At home the emergence of a Marxist regime in the newly established Soviet Union proved that a working class revolution was possible. With Britain fully industrialized, the Bolsheviks represented a mortal enemy to an imperial power such as the British Empire. Through a combination of hostile rhetoric originating from the Soviet Union, increased nationalist organization in India, and the historic rivalry in Central Asia, British leadership became wary of Soviet influence in its largest colony. The British colonial government was underfunded and under resourced in India when compared to its sheer size and population. Efforts to understand the growing political situation proved to be impossible. For the intelligence community in India, this meant that information had to be prioritized. The overall atmosphere of hostility to all things Bolshevik in British leadership predisposed its intelligence agencies to preferentially seek information on anything that could be connected back to the Soviet Union. What emerged was a picture of Bolshevik intrigue infiltrating into the Indian nationalist movement, allowing British leadership to partially blame the Soviet Union for the instability in India. The prejudice towards this strain of Indian nationalism was overplayed in the minds of the British, and allowed them to attach blame to a foreign power rather look towards their own treatment of Indians as reason enough to agitate for independence.
Map Centered on British India

# Table of Contents:

Introduction.................................................................................................................. 4

Chapter 1: The Threat Emerges, 1917-1919................................................................. 18

Chapter 2: The Height of the Scare, 1920-1925......................................................... 39

Chapter 3: Interest and Disinterest, 1926-1943......................................................... 64

Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 85

Appendix ...................................................................................................................... 90

Bibliography ................................................................................................................ 103
Introduction

The foremost global power at the turn of the twentieth century hailed from a relatively small island in the northwest of Europe. Eastward into mainland Europe a rapidly industrializing Germany was poised to overtake France as Great Britain’s chief rival. Further east saw the failed 1905 revolution to overthrow the Russian Romanov Dynasty. 1905 also included a Japanese defeat of Russia over interests in northeastern China and Korea. For the first time a non-European state defeated a major European power. Stability in Europe in terms of social and political peace seemed as unsettled as any point in the previous one hundred years. Widely read works such as Edward Gibbons’ *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* brought the concept of empire decay to the minds of citizens and officials of the British Empire.² It is amidst this atmosphere of apprehension which Great Britain entered World War I in 1914, balancing a continental war on the one hand with colonial maintenance on the other.

Britain relied heavily on its colonies for both raw materials and manpower throughout the war. Residents of these lands served the British well and expected to be rewarded. As in Europe, nationalist organizations were beginning to exert greater pressure on their rulers for independence. This was partially a consequence of European education made available to some in the indigenous population. Education acted as a double-edged sword for the British. It lowered costs associated with employing British citizens in the civil services of its colonies, but also exposed the indigenous population to the ideals of liberal political philosophy. The British rarely turned down an opportunity to tout their achievements at “spreading civilization” and used liberal education to help justify their presence throughout the world.³ The Empire had to deal with the consequences, however, as educated young Indian nationalist leaders formed a national

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³ Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire*, xix.
congress in 1885 and slowly began accumulating concessions from the British government. These proved just enough for some Indian leaders to continue cooperating with the British. For others it was never enough as immediate independence became the demand. Nationalism would only increase following the contribution of India to the Allied victory in 1918 of World War I. And when liberties were restricted in India rather than expanded, mass demonstrations broke out.

Meanwhile in Russia, the 1917 abdication of Czar Nicholas II was a moment in history when a true changing of the guard took place. An untested ideology was suddenly at the helm of one of the world’s greatest powers by means of revolution. Citizens and leaders in Europe and the United States suspicious of Bolshevism became swept up in the Red Scare. As a contrast, some in lands under colonial rule such as India saw the Marxist ideology as a viable alternative to what many saw as the exploitative nature of the capitalist model. This ideology openly condemned imperialism, labeling it as “the highest stage of capitalism” of which the young revolution in Russia sought to bring down. The newly established Soviet Union thus represented not just another potential global power, but one which threatened the very ideological foundations of the British Empire.

The independence sentiment in India would also get a boost from one of United States President Woodrow Wilson’s famous Fourteen Points. Of the points presented at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 was the right to national self-determination. A major argument now could be leveled against the legitimacy of the British Empire. While national self-determination was declared to apply only to Europe, perhaps this obvious hypocrisy was also intended to swing the balance of power towards the United States. Popular colonial opinion and many leaders educated in Western universities saw this inclusion in the peace treaty ending World War I as vindication

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to their right to independence.\textsuperscript{5} In the arena of colonial justification, national self-determination could do nothing but harm the morale standing of an empire and embolden its opponents.

The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia thus added an additional dynamic for the consideration of the British leadership in India. No longer was it simply a relationship between British and Indians regarding national self-determination and independence. The class-oriented structure of Marxism meant that as the phenomenon grew, there existed the potential for international involvement for what the British considered an internal matter. The British now potentially needed to have information on external matters to fully comprehend the political situation in India. This information came from the both the public realm, that of events and statements by political leaders, but also from non-public sources gathered from intelligence capabilities. The two sources combined to inform the leaders of the British Empire and in turn influence their understanding of the situation in India.

There is a diverse collection of works regarding British intelligence on Soviet interests in India. This topic, however, is not so specific in scope for it to be useful to analyze a singular perspective. In order to assess the degree and reasoning of insecurity the British had regarding Soviet influence in India, it is necessary to investigate the motivations and capabilities from these three national perspectives. It is from these starting points academic works can first be divided, then into various subgroups within the respective literatures. Further, there are two time periods that have an abundance of work which can serve as an additional organizational criterion beyond the thematic groups which dominate the scholarship. It can be useful to keep in mind the

larger contemporary issues that potentially exert influence over their authors, this author being no exception.

The first large collection of work occurred from the late 1960s to early 1970s. Much of these works were by Indian scholars who sought to investigate the influence of socialism in the Indian nationalist movement. Perhaps this period was motivated because it was only a few years after India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was no longer in power. The opening of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library had taken place in 1967 and so the intellectual community in India was eager to write his history and place it within a larger worldview. This period was also framed by the Cold War, in which India under Nehru had tried to maneuver itself into a non-alignment stance diplomatically situated between the United States and the Soviet Union. It is within this context that these authors sought to frame India’s independence movement as drawing on elements from both the liberal West and socialist Soviet Union. These works certainly have an Indian nationalist focus and are often by Indian scholars providing the historical context in the opening decades of a newly independent India.

The other period of time which yielded the most scholarship on this topic is during the past decade. The topic has often centered on notions of empire, imperial decline, and intelligence gathering services. While the subject of the British Empire has turned out a relatively consistent

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amount of work for decades, the surge in the decade in these particular themes may also reflect contemporary issues. While Britain no longer has its empire, it has been popular to compare the United States’ position in the world now with that of Britain pre-World War II. Moral issues surrounding the responsibility associated with imperialism frequented the minds of British leaders. The use of intelligence has been included in much recent scholarship regarding the role it served in the larger picture of empire, security, and effective rule. The parallel between the United States today and the British Empire of the past attracts many, just as comparisons of the British Empire to the Roman Empire did the same in prior centuries.

There are two ways to organize scholarship on the Soviet Union useful for analyzing influence in India in the 1920s and 1930s. Some focus on the ideological motivations and inspiration the Soviet Union presented for Indian nationalists. To a lesser extent other pieces detail Soviet influence in terms of direct leadership, funding, and arms supplied to Indian communists. The works that were written preeminent in the 1960s and 1970s are largely those from the outgrowth of Indian nationalist works that investigated the influence of socialism on the movement. The more recent scholarship centering on the direct Soviet impact and its role in leading international communism has undoubtedly benefitted from the opening of the Soviet archives following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. These works were able to investigate


both the motivations the Soviet Union had for being interested in places such as India, and its subsequent actions. They generally do not look at India as a central topic as it seems to be too specific to generate enough evidence. This is an area that could benefit from expanded use of A.J. Farrington’s *Indian Political Intelligence Files*, a source that will be a cornerstone of this work.\(^{11}\) The works addressing direct Soviet influence are fewer in number as India was just one of many places that the Soviets considered had potential for communist growth.

The motivations of the Soviet Union to take an interest in India are rooted in scholarship on the international nature of Marxism. Jonathan Haslem is one example of analyzing Soviet foreign policy in this vein. His work places the behavior of the Soviet Union within the context of the global economic crisis triggered by the market crash in 1929.\(^ {12}\) Haslem argues that the Soviet Union’s foreign policy goals had to maintain a balance between capitalizing on the disarray of western economies while strengthening the Soviet economy. It hoped to display the superiority of communism over capitalism for all the world to see with the goal of hastening communism’s supposed inevitable triumph. This was done while in addition attempting to prepare for a great European war that Soviet leaders such a Joseph Stalin believed to be coming as a result of the economic crisis.\(^ {13}\) It is these other internal priorities that led to direct efforts to organize communist movements abroad to be tempered by the 1930s.\(^ {14}\) At the same time elements within the Soviet government saw the failure of basic ground level campaigns in other nations as very frustrating to the ultimate goals of Marxism. Evidence backing up this point can


\(^{13}\) Haslem, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930-33: The Impact of the Depression*, 1.

be seen in the example of India.\textsuperscript{15} Haslem says that foreign policy was “anything but monolithic” for the Soviet Union and blames these inconsistencies within the Soviet government for the failure of international communism.\textsuperscript{16} Internal disputes led to a lack of coordination between different sections of the government, an interesting parallel at the time to the government of the British Empire.

For the Indian perspective the general pattern of scholarship could be categorized as one which focuses on biographical works of leading Indian nationalists. Within that field there are works that specifically focus on socialist influences in the lives of these nationalists and comments on how directly influenced they were by the Soviet Union. A group within the biographic scholars focuses on individual nationalists’ possible sympathies for the Soviet Union rather than explicit Soviet efforts. This is especially true for works on the larger nationalist figures like Mohandas Gandhi or Jawaharlal Nehru. Attention centers more on Indian motives rather than Soviet motives. This focus suggests that political sympathies had the largest impact on Indian politics in comparison to tangible efforts such as funding or arms on the part of the Soviets.\textsuperscript{17} Scholars here attempt to trace Indian socialism through individual biographies rather than national level politics and trends. This is argued through the words of prominent Indian nationalist leaders explaining why they adopted socialist sympathies, and the degree which they

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
gained guidance or inspiration from the emergence of the Soviet Union. Scholars in this group largely argue that the presence of the Soviet Union had a definite impact on nationalists’ individual politics, and that it was largely unavoidable due to it taking up the opposite ideological position of the British Empire. They argue this fact sparked at least curiosity for some Indian nationalists, and led to further involvement by others.

There is an abundance of work analyzing the well-known Indian nationalist leaders such as Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, along with others such as Manahendra Nath Roy and Subhas Chandra Bose. G.N. Dikshit writes in *Gandhi’s Challenge to Communism* that Gandhi recognized the appeal of communism for a colonial country such as India and the hope the new Soviet Union gave many Indians. He writes, however, that Gandhi found communism to be irreconcilable with India because of its lack of humanity, its lack of religion and individuality. Dikshit argues that while Gandhi had mass appeal, some of which overlapped with the mass appeal of communism, in reality Gandhi reached much of his political views independently and was as opposed to communism as foreign capitalist exploitation in India.

R.C. Dutt’s *Socialism of Jawaharlal Nehru* traces India’s first prime minister and Gandhi protégé’s socialistic influences. Dutt writes more how Nehru looked to the Soviet Union for inspiration rather than direction. For Nehru, there are both direct and indirect examples of the Soviet Union in his life as he visited and wrote about the USSR in the late 1920s. Nehru seems to have been more directly influenced early on however, as by the late 1930s Soviet leader Josef Stalin shifted Soviet policy and Nehru became less than inspired specifically by Soviet Communism than by the ideals of socialism. Specifically the ideas that continued to shape

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20 Dikshit, *Gandhi’s Challenge to Communism*, 100.
21 Dutt, *Socialism of Jawaharlal Nehru*. 
Nehru’s political outlook required non-violent and more egalitarian ideals than the reality of 1930s Soviet Union. Both authors credit the Soviet Union with shaping at least part of Indian nationalist leaders’ worldview. Some, like Gandhi, largely rejected what they saw, while others such as Nehru incorporated certain aspects into their politics.

While the Soviet Union professed an ideological goal to spread the egalitarianism of communism for the benefit of mankind, perhaps its efforts in India were first and foremost a desire to weaken a rival global power. Regardless of what motivated the Soviet Union to take up interest in South Asia, real efforts in terms of funding, arms, and organizational capabilities to undermine British rule took place. B. R. Nanda’s edited collection of essays Socialism in India includes articles dealing with the more direct role of the Soviet Union in Indian politics in the interwar years of 1919-1939. This collection grew out of a seminar convened by scholars of Indian history and socialism in 1968 and 1969 in Delhi. The attempt was to discern the origins of socialism in India and its lasting impact. The essay by Vijay Sen Budhraj entitled “The Communist International and Indian Politics” covers the years of early Soviet policy and their efforts to cultivate a functional Indian communist party. He argues that Indian communism struggled to gain a credible foothold in the colony. This was due to a combination of lackluster support for Indian communists, in part from Gandhi’s overwhelming presence in Indian politics, and due to the Communist International’s ever changing strategy for spreading global revolution. Another article by Zafar Imam within the same collection entitled “The Rise of Soviet Russia and Socialism in India, 1917-1939” situates the rise of the Soviet Union as influential for the full spectrum of socialism. Imam argues, however, that the influence was more

22 Dutt, Socialism of Jawaharlal Nehru, 167.
23 Nanda, ed., Socialism in India.
from indirect ideological means than direct, coordinated efforts. The two authors agree on the disproportionate amount of British attention devoted to the topic than the reality in Indian politics warranted. This leads to the question of whether it just seems disproportionate in retrospect, or if perhaps British attention was effective at thwarting Soviet influence.

The third collection of research centers on the British Empire. There are several works pertaining to the interests of the British intelligence community in the colonies of the Empire. John Ferris’s article “Tradition and System: British Intelligence and the Old World Order” and John Fisher’s *Gentleman Spies* both seek to situate the role of intelligence gathering as it evolved in the British Empire. Both write about how the new technologies of the twentieth century revolutionized intelligence gathering in focus and organization. The biographic focus is not unique to Indian nationalists either, however. Fisher shows this through the personal story of N.N.E. Bray, an Indian Army officer and special intelligence operative who was very much a pioneer in tracking Bolshevism in India. Ferris’s work shows that the intelligence community was forced to act differently after World War I than it had before. Through reading both in conjunction it becomes clear that the intelligence community was delving into something it had little experience with previously. It had to adapt to new technologies used for intelligence purposes. This gave intelligence agents copious amounts of information. The sheer volume lent the appearance of evidence supporting any number of suspicions leaders already had. It was the difficulties discerning volume from possible selective gathering practices that leads one to wonder if British paranoia altered how they constructed the political reality of India. An

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27 See Fisher, *Gentleman Spies: Intelligence Agents in the British Empire and Beyond*.
28 See David Carlton, *Churchill and the Soviet Union* (Manchester University Press, 2000), and Van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin*, for works on Churchill and Stalin respectively.
information overload of sorts could have led relatively inexperienced intelligence officers to misinterpret and over-assign value to reports and information received.\textsuperscript{30}

The use of intelligence gathering and methods of analyzing and interpreting factor into the questions historians ask about the existence of empire. What are the goals of imperialism, what are the strategies employed to protect it, and how are those in power assessing the strength of their grasp on power? Piers Brendon spares no opportunity to retell British government officials’ comparisons between the Roman and British Empires. The name of his book, \textit{The Decline and Fall of the British Empire} is a play on historian Edward Gibbons’ eighteenth century work \textit{The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire}.\textsuperscript{31} Together with authors such as Michael Silvestri and Linda Colley, Brendon’s work seeks to re-label the era of the British Empire and imperialism not as one dominated by a confident, superior power but one that was operated by an insecure nation fraught with failings and conflicts, both within its colonies and within its leadership.\textsuperscript{32} There are works that include how the Bolshevik Revolution changed the landscape within the British government and how these efforts manifested in the colonial lands.\textsuperscript{33}

Common themes focus on the idea of empire such as its operations, roles, and lasting impact. Within that group is work such as that of Andrew Muldon which includes a section on intelligence collection, its effectiveness, and how it may have fed into pre-existing insecurities regarding imperial power.\textsuperscript{34}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} Muldon, \textit{Empire, Politics and the Creation of the 1935 India Act}, 34.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Brendon, \textit{The Decline and Fall of the British Empire}, xv. Also see Linda Colley, \textit{Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850} (New York: Random House, 2002), and Michael Silvestri, \textit{Ireland and India: Nationalism, Empire and Memory} (London: Pilgrave Macmillan, 2009).
\item \textsuperscript{32} Brendon, \textit{The Decline and Fall of the British Empire}, xviii.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Muldon, \textit{Empire, Politics and the Creation of the 1935 India Act}, 31.
\end{itemize}
It will be necessary to stitch together conclusions made by historians researching these three distinct historical perspectives surrounding Soviet influence in British India. This will illuminate information collected by British Intelligence in India which documented Soviet influences and communist organizations within India in the interwar period. Ultimately conclusions can then be corroborated with primary sources generated by the documents and statements produced by Soviet, British, and Indian leaders. The sources included in this historiography are a diverse group. This diversity is the result of a requirement to look at three distinct interests: Soviet leadership and Marxism in general, Indian nationalists, and the British government. Diversity is also evident in methods used. Many authors use stories of individuals to illustrate the history of various topics. The works by authors such as Fisher, Ganguly, Dutt and Dikshit display the topics of British insecurity, intelligence, and Indian nationalism. Some use comparison, either between individuals such as Dikshit’s *Gandhi’s Challenge to Communism* or between nations such as Neilson’s *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939*. The contemporary events of a scholar also influence the questions they ask. This is displayed by work investigating socialist influences in Indian nationalists amid the height of the cold war, to reevaluating the effectiveness of intelligence and notions of empire decline in the post-9/11 world.

The rhetoric of British leaders in the interwar period made it appear that Bolshevik conspiracies of overthrowing the capitalist world order were real possibilities everywhere. The British feared indirect Soviet influences in India through the success of a rival ideology which was inherently hostile to imperialism. The volumes of intelligence collected in India created the impression that Soviet-directed communists had infiltrated large segments of society. After all, the British tracked direct influences in the form of funding, arms, and communications not just
from Bolshevik communists, but from anyone with socialist leanings. These Soviet influences served to provide an ideological alternative and material support for India’s nationalist leaders following World War I. An empire accustomed to being the dominant power feared the stigma of loss. These fears led to what appears to be paranoia, that is, the overly credulous appraisal of a threat. India in fact did not violently overthrow British rule before World War II despite some attempts, and even when it was granted independence, it was not a Soviet-led communist nation behind the Iron Curtain, but instead it became a fledgling democracy.

Why then did the British believe Soviet involvement in India was so great? For one, there is credible rhetorical and material evidence that the Soviet Union did actively support revolutionary efforts in India. This evidence can be found in the many speeches and written works that came out of the Communist International. It was the origin of financial support, educational training, and even armament shipments tracked by British intelligence services. Marxism openly argues for the abolition of capitalism, and the establishment of the Communist International in Moscow provided the leadership for spreading communism abroad. Secondly, Indian nationalists expressed varying degrees of receptiveness and curiosity regarding the Soviet Union. From the British perspective, the potential for a mutually beneficial India-Soviet Union relationship existed. And thirdly, the British Empire’s efforts to assess the threat in India were hindered by its ability to collect and analyze unbiased and reliable information. The intelligence community was subject to the influences of the Empire’s leaders, who had an innate hostility towards the Soviet Union. It was also unable to collect and analyze all-encompassing information on political unrest in India, a nation of hundreds of millions. All told, the perceived ambitions of a young Soviet Union were a convenient explanation for the ills of an over-extended empire. Rather than admit that colonial subjects of the Empire genuinely wanted
independence, the leaders of the British Empire arrived at the Soviet Union as an enemy to
British rule in India not first out of evidence, but out of ideology. The presented evidence
followed to fit the circumstances.
Chapter One: The Threat Emerges  
1917-1919

The articulation of both national self-determination and the appearance of communism challenged the British Empire in India following World War I. The Soviet Union of the early interwar period based itself on Vladimir Lenin’s unique brand of communism. This ideology was rooted in the theories first put forth by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Marxism is inherently hostile to imperialism, and so it is no wonder why the British were at such unease at the existence of a world power founded on such an ideology.

As of the previous century “a spectre [was] haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism” so declared Karl Marx and coauthor Frederick Engels in the Manifesto of the Communist Party of 1848.\(^{35}\) This document was the basis for the communist parties that would form in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries throughout Europe. It described the critiques of the capitalist world-order in mid-nineteenth century Western Europe and theorized the solutions to these critiques. Embedded throughout the Manifesto is language which implores the reader to take up the goals of communism, with violence when necessary. It is this combination of argued widespread injustice, destined progression towards a future of equality, and inspiration of revolutionary behavior that made the document such a powerful force in the years to come.

Marx and Engels arrived at their theories through a linear study of history in which humanity continually develops and gains further liberties.\(^{36}\) It followed that the most developed capitalist societies would be the first to undergo a revolution of the proletariat. Great Britain had


\(^{36}\) Toews, ed., The Communist Manifesto: With Related Documents, 23.
been the first nation to industrialize and so had the most developed proletariat class. This helped explain Great Britain’s ability to dominate the imperial competition between European nations in the nineteenth century. Classic Marxism follows that once a nation such as Great Britain, France or Germany underwent a workers revolution, the rest of the world would fall as dominoes. The proletariat class would export the revolution to lesser developed nations until the world was united under the banner of communism. The revolution thus would not be achieved on a nationalist platform, but a class-based one as workers of the world would unite.\textsuperscript{37}

Under this order of revolution Russia should not have been the first communist nation due to the fact that it had one of the least developed industrial working classes in all of Europe. Great Britain had every reason to fear communism, but under the thoughts of Marx and Engels it should have originated in Britain.\textsuperscript{38} At the turn of the twentieth century Russia under the Czar was chiefly an agrarian economy. After 1905 it underwent democratic reforms but still had elements of the old monarchy intact. Russia was not only the wrong place for revolution in terms of its limited industrial proletariat, but its political system did not foster the type of guaranteed constitutional freedoms that a communist revolution would require. Institutions of a liberal democracy such as freedom of press, assembly, and protesting grievances would allow for a revolution of the masses to spread with minimal bloodshed and maximum legality.

The caveat that would embolden followers of Marxism outside the most developed nations was a later admission by Marx and Engels. After witnessing the revolutions of 1848 across Central Europe, they revised the original document and argued it could endure later

\textsuperscript{37} Marx & Engels, \textit{Manifesto of the Communist Party}, 96.
\textsuperscript{38} See Benedetto Croce, \textit{Marx and Russia} (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1966) for more on applicability to Russia.
editions and amendments as the world changed.\textsuperscript{39} Although minor changes could be expected, at its core the \textit{Communist Manifesto} would remain a relevant critique of capitalism. It is this acceptance of alteration that gave revolutionaries outside of Western Europe justification for their own applications for communism. It allowed Vladimir Lenin to introduce and lead the revolution to succeed in Russia. Long the back-water of Europe, suddenly the new Soviet Union was the leader of a new vision of the world. Great Britain did not have to fear revolutionary behavior from its domestic working class alone, but potentially the lower classes anywhere both home and in the colonies should Marxism establish itself as a global phenomenon.

The established world order was officially on notice with the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in February of 1917.\textsuperscript{40} Lenin’s Bolsheviks were not the only Marxist’s of the time, but their adherence to violence helped them become the strongest. Whereas other parties within the Russian Revolution remained willing to work within the existing political structures, Lenin constantly argued that the present was the only time for revolution.\textsuperscript{41} Lenin’s Russia had only a short lived semi-democratic government and was one of the least developed economies in Europe. But he adopted Marxism to fit the conditions of Russia by introducing a peasant element. He led the Bolsheviks to take up arms, and with superior party organization and strategic ruthlessness was able to establish the first Marxist regime in the world by toppling one of the largest empires.\textsuperscript{42} If the British knew anything about Marxism they would naturally have asked themselves if a similar revolution was possible in Britain since it had just occurred in largely peasant Russia.


\textsuperscript{40} Or March, considering Russia at the time was one the Julian calendar and the rest of Europe on the Gregorian stemming from past centuries’ differences between Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Catholocism.

\textsuperscript{41} Fulop-Miller, \textit{Lenin and Gandhi}, 116.

\textsuperscript{42} Lenin hoped violence would be only a short lived tool. Fulop-Miller, \textit{Lenin and Gandhi}, viii.
In a series of essays published while exiled from Russia in 1916, Lenin articulated how imperialism was the “highest stage of capitalism.”\(^{43}\) This imperial exploitation meant that the oppressed classes existed not only in developed western European nations, but that their rule over peoples across the globe represented the worst, most exploitative form of capitalism to date. It was partly on this explanation that Lenin and the Bolsheviks did not support Russia’s involvement in World War I, what they dubbed “The Great Imperial War.” The shrewd leader that he was, Lenin effectively portrayed the Bolsheviks as caring not about territorial gains or nationalistic ideals but caring for the masses of workers. He was also able to sell Russia to fellow Marxists as just the beginning of a larger global revolution that was to follow. It was an historical guarantee according to Marx, perhaps just originating in an unexpected location and at a quicker pace than expected.

Lenin did not envision this class revolution beginning and ending in Russia. In fact, the grasp on power was precarious and Lenin was counting on reinforcements from foreign sources. While Lenin altered Marx’s progression of revolution by starting it not in the most developed capitalist country, he nonetheless saw the importance to continuing the revolution’s success by exporting it to these nations before it failed in Russia.\(^{44}\) The Bolsheviks were not just facing threats from other less radical Marxists, liberals, and conservatives within Russia, but foreign aid and armies supporting these efforts bolstered their opposition. Winston Churchill earned a reputation as being “the foremost Western enemy of the Bolsheviks during their struggle to consolidate their authority in Russia” as a member of the War Cabinet beginning in 1918.\(^{45}\) The West suspected that communism was inherently hostile to their present societies. Soviet revolutionary Leon Trotsky made this suspicion no secret as it was “the possessing classes, who

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\(^{43}\) See Vladimir I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Zurich: 1916).

\(^{44}\) Van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin*, 46.

rightly sensed in it (the Communist Manifesto) their mortal enemy. Fortunately for Lenin following World War I, most western nations were in no position to contribute substantively to opposition forces, and the Bolsheviks ultimately consolidated power and established the Soviet Union even as civil war and resistance continued for a few more years.

The establishment of the Soviet Union was supposed to prove to Marxists in Germany, France, and Great Britain that a communist state was in fact possible. The message was if a nation with such a poorly developed proletariat class could undergo a Marxist revolution, the nations of Western Europe with much larger numbers of industrial workers certainly could do the same. If the revolution ever was going to occur on a world-wide scale, however, it had to occur with these economies as the bulwark of communism. Lenin saw the Soviet Union as the trigger, or the weak link, in European capitalism. Russia was a country that was so economically backwards in comparison to the rest of Europe that not even capitalism had fully taken root. It was therefore thought that communism could be constructed on top of the existing village communes without an extended fight by a well-established bourgeois class that other nations pressed. Indeed once the Soviet Union was established, leftist parties across Europe and America began to grow and play a more prominent role in local politics. Leading Soviet revolutionaries believed the devastation across Europe following World War I would make it especially weak economically and susceptible to political revolution. The Soviet Union was in prime position to take up leadership on the matter.

The ideology of the new Soviet Union was openly hostile to the rest of capitalist Europe. Great Britain saw the danger posed by the Soviet Union and following the war assigned greater

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47 Van Ree, The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin, 40.
resources to opposing it. This took the form of aid to anti-Bolshevik parties fighting in the Russian Civil War, but also intelligence collection on internal leftist organizations and external Soviet meddling such as those in India. The Soviet Union took up responsibility as the first communist nation to cultivate and support the revolution abroad. Those potential revolutions’ survival depended on this as much as its own. Its most immediate neighbor was Germany, a nation humiliated by defeat and burdensome reparations. Lenin and others in Soviet leadership made continued overtures towards Germany trying to make friends with the former foe.

The British Empire had just survived its greatest threat as World War I came to a close late in 1918. The trauma of war historically has a destabilizing effect on governments. This was one possible reason Russia experienced the political turmoil it did following the war with Japan in 1905 and throughout World War I. The Allies had defeated the Central Powers, but the war effort was aided in part with help from their many colonial possessions. This aid acted to soften the hit an economy such as Great Britain or France would have suffered through war-time losses. The British utilized strategic war-time materials such as oil from the Middle East, rubber from South America and Africa, and even soldiers from India. These lands had contributed greatly to the war effort, and in turn many in these lands hoped their “good” behavior would be rewarded following the war. The expectation was that “nothing remained to be done, it seemed, except to make ready for the transfer of power” explains one historian. However, the reality of continuing British rule quickly became apparent in places such as India. Britain’s largest possession would not sit idly by and civil unrest began to rise.

48 See Farrington, ed., Indian Political Intelligence Files: 1912-1950.
The world looked on with anticipation to the post-war order that would emerge following the Peace of Paris in early 1919. Nationalist fervor was increasing in India with many patient Indian leaders expect concessions from the British government in exchange for the sacrifices and loyalty India displayed throughout the war. Entire regiments of Indian Sepoys fought along the western front on behalf of the Allies.\(^5^1\) As of 1919, units of Indians were in Iraq, Egypt, Palestine, and along the Back Sea under the British flag.\(^5^2\) Resources and capital had flowed into Britain throughout World War I contributing to Britain’s ability to maintain its industrial capacity. Instead of increased autonomy, however, India was greeted with the Rowlatt Acts. This legislation restricted the civil liberties of Indians and was passed without input from the Indian National Congress.\(^5^3\) It appeared the British government hoped to gain a preemptive advantage to quell the unrest they knew they would provoke by further denying independence.

And provoke they did. During the summer of 1919 mass demonstrations began throughout the country. British military forces were far outnumbered in India with totals in the tens of thousands compared to India’s population of hundreds of millions. The tension came to a head in what would be known as the Amritsar, or Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. With varying and conflicting reports at what exactly sparked the violence, the outcome was not in question. Armed soldiers were ordered to fire and maintain firing into an unarmed crowd.\(^5^4\) The crowd of thousands was trapped in an enclosed courtyard with only one escape route blocked by British soldiers. When the dust settled an estimated 1,200 had been shot and 379 lay dead.\(^5^5\) India was shocked at what had occurred. While the commanding officer was reprimanded for ordering his

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\(^5^1\) Sepoy is the name historically given to Indian soldiers who served under the British crown.


\(^5^4\) Unarmed referring to firearms. Does not mention other weapons such as knives. Furneaux, *Massacre at Amritsar*, 33.

\(^5^5\) Indian estimates are higher. Furneaux, *Massacre at Amritsar*, 16.
men to fire, the discipline was decided in British courts, not Indian, a fact that added salt to the wounds.

British rule was increasingly seen as an oppressive regime rather than a benevolent democracy. While the calming sentiments of Gandhi would greatly mute the violent impulses, from this point onward the option of maintaining a status-quo relationship with the British was off the table for the majority of Indian leadership. Politicians and the masses alike became more aware of the political environment of India in the post-World War I world, and the British resolved to rely on more clandestine operations to stay a step ahead of the growing political unrest in India. British rule in India was far from uneventful prior to this. Also, since 1885 there had been an Indian National Congress which pushed the British colonial government for Indian interests, though in reality it possessed little real power for much of its existence.

The turn of the twentieth century saw the first rumblings of sustained Indian nationalism with the rise to prominence of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, called the “Father of Indian Nationalism.” His efforts earned him multiple prison sentences and helped lay the foundation for the growing nationalist sentiment that would follow. Through the years of World War I British control in India was firm despite differing effectiveness of various viceroys in charge of the Government of India. That began to change with the close of World War I in part because Britain’s economy and military was at its weakest immediately after the war. They had been stretched thin from war. National self-determination contributed as a term colonial peoples increasingly used for justification of independence.\(^\text{56}\) The concept made British officials nervous as unrest mounted in India.

Perhaps one of the most endearing legacies the British left in their colonial lands was that of education opportunities. While far from universal and equitable, there was still large numbers

of Indians educated either in schools established in India or in the universities of Europe. There is no telling how important this would be for the Indian nationalism that would emerge. Individuals educated as doctors, lawyers, or members of the civil service would go on to become the intellectuals and leaders of the nationalist movement. These were people who had experience within the bureaucracy of the government. Many were convinced they could govern on their own as well, if not better than British foreign to India. The British policy of developing an Indian ruling class of civil servants contributed to the nationalist fervor. These indigenous leaders were better equipped through education and experience to fight the system they saw as oppressing their peoples. An educated civil service class gradually formed in India since the British took firm political control in 1857. The western liberal philosophy many were taught was not inherently racist and allowed Indian leaders to stand toe-to-toe intellectually with leaders in the British government. The racial superiority many British officials assumed only stood to embolden their nationalist opponents, and perhaps prevented British leadership from accurately assessing the growing strength of the movement.

The key leaders of India’s nationalist movement all were Western educated. Men such as Mohandas Gandhi, the intellectual leader of the movement, Jawaharlal Nehru, who would become the first prime minister of India, and Mohammad Ali Jinnah the first prime minister of Pakistan all attended universities outside of India. This invariably introduced an element of foreign influence in the Indian independence movement. Some of India’s most prominent nationalists where exposed to not only classic western democratic views, but that of Marxism while in Europe.

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57 Patil, Subhas Chandra Bose: His Contribution to Indian Nationalism, 179.
The socialist influences some picked up in the west were not necessarily entirely new to India either. Author V.S. Patil argues that elements of socialist philosophy were reminiscent of sentiments in the ancient Sanskrit texts of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and of Buddhism and Jainism which preach the lessons of justice, liberty, equality, happiness, and welfare. Patil also argues the scripts from the ancient Sanskrit Vedas “breathe the spirit of socialism.” Of course it could also be strongly argued that similar sentiments in western history tracing back to the bible exist as well. The Indian revolutionary Subhas Chandra Bose once said “the new ideas of socialism are nowadays traveling to India from the West, and so they are revolutionizing the thoughts of many, but the idea of socialism is not a novelty in this country. We regard it as such because we have lost thread of our own history.” At the very least it is a factor to consider why various Indian nationalists had known socialist sentiments. It may also partially explain why the British assigned so much weight to threats to their power. It may have caused the British to suspect potential influence from the Soviet Union being heard by a receptive audience.

The first two decades of the twentieth century saw India’s nascent nationalist movement start to grumble. The British had slowly been creating in India a government which incorporated democratic elements. For nationalists educated in the west this did not pose much of a problem. For the most part they saw western democratic governance as the most just the world had yet seen. If only the same principles of popular participation and self-rule were applied in their homelands there would be much less of a problem. This ideal was complicated with the establishment of the first Marxist regime in the world. With the creation of the Soviet Union, a curiosity about success or failure of an entirely new system would develop. Nehru explained in April of 1919 that “today the spectre [of Communism] has materialized and is holding the

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Western world in its grip – What is this spectre, this new spirit which is conquering the peoples of Europe and America and yet is so bitterly opposed and maligned by the men in authority?“

Now those hoping to instill a new government in India had a different model to consider. A western education would have meant India’s leaders had already an understanding of Marxist thought.

From the British perspective, a perfect storm was forming in India to foment revolution following World War I. The growing educated middle and upper classes in India were becoming aware of what national self-determination could mean for India. For decades Indian leaders had to contend with the British justifications that increased democracy would come when India was ready. The hypocrisy of British rule was apparent in that they believed in democracy, yet denied it to millions of people. Now with ideas of national self-determination abound Britain had yet another philosophical debate with which it was on the wrong end of.

With India laying just an Afghanistan away from the Soviet Union, and the historical context of the Great Game taking place the past century, the British Empire saw a serious threat mounting both geographically and ideologically.61 India was arguably the most important of Britain’s overseas colonies in terms of the vast wealth of resources its size represented. Russia was also the traditional rival of Great Britain to the northwest of the subcontinent. While the British may not have feared a Russian conquest of India as much, they knew the blow it would be to their empire to lose India. A Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, once explained “…neither Russian statesmen nor Russian generals are foolish enough to dream of the conquest of India, they do most seriously contemplate the invasion of India; and that with a very definite purpose

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61 The Great Game refers to the 19th century rivalry in Central Asia between Great Britain and Russia. It culminated in a series of wars over Afghanistan, long seen as the historic invasion route to India. See Brobst, The Future of The Great Game: Sir Olaf Caroe, India’s Independence, and the Defence of Asia.
which many of them are candid enough to avow. “62 The purpose he inferred being to strike at a base of wealth and resources for a rival such as Great Britain. India had historically been a “central bastion” of world power, as former British officer turned writer Olaf Kirkpatrick Caroe wrote.63 Internal unrest was growing in India, and a potential major external threat was emerging from the core of Eurasia. It is from these considerations that a newly focused eye turned towards political rumblings that could have had influence from the Soviet Union in India following World War I.

The bigger threat in the eyes of the British lay in the stated goals of the new Soviet Union. An untested ideology opposed to the very capitalist system that had brought Britain its empire now occupied a major world power. This power had a self-espoused goal of spreading its revolution across Europe and the world. The “Red Scare” that swept across Great Britain was fed by the growth of the British Communist Party and the increase in organized labor in the late 1910s and early 1920s.64 The British government had perhaps no more vocal leader regarding the Soviet threat than Winston Churchill. He was particularly alarmed at domestic connections between British citizens and the Soviet Union.65 Churchill had a history of foreign relations and/or military posts in the British government entering this period, and of course would continue to be major voice for decades to come. He served as Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1905-1908 and Minister of Munitions from 1917-1919 within the War Cabinet. As early as November 1918, on the eve of the Treaty of Versailles that would cripple Germany’s new democratic Weimar Republic, Churchill advocated building up the German army for fear of

63 Olaf Kirkpatrick Caroe, quoted in Peter John Brobst, The Future of The Great Game: Sir Olaf Caroe, India’s Independence, and the Defence of, xiv. Not specified which of Caroe’s later writings this was quoted from.
64 Nielson, Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939, 45.
65 Carlton, Churchill and the Soviet Union, 21.
the spread of Bolshevism. It appears that while the rest of Europe wanted to avoid another arms race with Germany that led to the most destructive war yet seen, Churchill was more concerned with containing a Bolshevik regime that had withdrawn from war. Churchill obviously saw more long-term danger in a group of Marxists than a fully industrialized Germany.

The Soviet Union did not try to ease the minds of its European neighbors regarding its international goals. It went as far as creating an entity dedicated to the cause of international communism. The aptly named Communist International was formed in March of 1919, with the first meetings held March 2-6. The duties of the Communist International, or Comintern, were to “establish a common fighting organ for the purpose of maintaining permanent co-ordination and systematic leadership of the movement, a centre of the communist international, subordinating the interests of the movement in each country to the common interest of the international revolution.” The Communist International thus performed an array of tasks relating to spreading the revolution. This organization operated independently of any Soviet elected body and most of the Communist Party structure. The only body it answered to directly was the Presidium of the Soviet Union, its highest institution. See Appendix A. It is also interesting to note that German was the official language of the first congress considering where the Soviet Union intended the revolution to go in next.

Grigory Zinoviev, one of the initial members of the Communist International, wrote in the founding document that “our task is to generalize the revolutionary experience of the working class, to cleanse the movement of the disintegrating admixtures of opportunism and

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66 Carlton, Churchill and the Soviet Union, 5.
social patriotism, to mobilize the forces of all genuinely revolutionary parties of the world proletariat and thereby facilitate and hasten the victory of the communist revolution throughout the world."\(^{70}\) It is by its very nature why the British Empire took interest to its actions and why leaders such as Churchill were right to suspect the Soviet Union of subversive activities. Following World War I Western European economies were devastated. Existing governments were the weakest they had been since the Napoleonic Wars. The first red scare was sweeping across Europe and the United States. Unionization was at its highest mark in history and left leaning parties were making inroads throughout the international community. The optimism within Soviet leaders was at a peak as expectations were abound of Germany falling to communist sentiments within months.

If Gandhi could be assigned as the intellectual leader of Indian nationalism, then Lenin was the intellectual leader of the communist revolution. His statues still dot the Russian landscape and its former Soviet republics. He dominated the shaping and formation of the Soviet Union during the early years. At the opening of the First Congress of the Communist International on March 2\(^{nd}\), 1919, it was he who delivered the opening remarks.\(^{71}\) In this short speech he mentioned workers movements in Germany twice, saying “comrades, our gathering has great historic significance. It testifies to the collapse of all the illusions cherished by bourgeois democrats. Not only in Russia, but in the most developed capitalist countries of Europe, Germany for example, civil war is a fact.”\(^{72}\) He would go on to include Great Britain too, showing immediately the two nations where the desire to spread revolution was greatest.

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Lenin spoke confidently of the continued success and spread of the communist revolution abroad. He stated that “the bourgeoisie are terror-stricken at the growing workers’ revolutionary movement” and that the “the imperialist war inevitably favors the workers’ revolutionary movement, and that the world revolution is beginning and growing in intensity everywhere.” Lenin closed his remarks by stating “victory will be ours, the victory of the world-wide communist revolution is assured.” It is key that Lenin referred to the First World War as an imperialist war, demonstrating the terms in which Marxists viewed the world.

The platform of this first Communist International holds nothing back in its language or its stated intentions. First is “the conquest of political power,” which it explains as “the annihilation of the political power of the bourgeois.” Second to conquest is “democracy and dictatorship,” an interesting relationship those two seem to have under the Soviet ideal. It is interesting that the platform notes:

Like all states, the proletarian state is an instrument of repression, but it is directed against the enemies of the working class. Its purpose is to break the resistance of the exploiters, who use every means at their disposal in the desperate struggle to drown the revolution in blood, to make their resistance impossible. The dictatorship of the proletariat, which openly gives the proletariat a privileged position in society, is however a provisional institution.

These are the terms in which Soviet leaders thought and this sort of promised temporal limit gave them license to commit whatever acts necessary to ensure the success of the revolution. It is this kind of rhetoric that left outsiders convinced there would be no peace with a communist regime.

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Europe was worn out from war by 1919. The people and economies needed recovery. No one was in much of a position to aid the conservatives and moderates in the Russian Civil War. The United States was ramping up production across the Atlantic, but offered no immediate threat to the new Bolshevik regime. Political parties in Great Britain experimented with leftist ideals, the Labour and Socialist parties in particular. The Communist International debated on its affiliation with organizations such as these as hard-liners within the revolution had always condemned more moderate Marxists as friends of the liberal-democrats and threats to the strength of revolution. Using these conditions as opportunity the Soviets sought to fortify their power throughout the new Soviet state and further the cause of revolution. The Communist International worked to exploit the clear inequalities and failures of the capitalist system brought to the forefront by the war. Weak capitalist economies also gave the Soviets fodder for propaganda purposes among the industrial working classes, further solidifying a quickly centralizing state. These conditions left Soviet leaders convinced that the world was ripe for their brand of Marxism, both economically and politically, and that it would happen soon.

Bearing in mind the post-war economic climate of Europe with the Marxist-Leninist theory of communist revolution, it seemed that a workers revolt to rise up in nations across Europe was plausible. Lenin recognized that the Soviet Union’s chances for survival increased greatly if there was another communist nation to absorb some of the world’s attention. Official documents of the Communist International voiced concern that soon enough “the danger that the alliance of capitalist States will strangle this movement.”\textsuperscript{76} Western Europe had a much more robust working-class. Lenin figured if he could convert Russia, Western Europe’s combined

populations of workers and peasants should have been able topple their governments more easily than it had been in Russia.

Lenin had proclaimed that victory was assured. The ideal timeline therefore was shockingly short. It started out with numbers being counted in the months, six or nine before the first nations would fall, namely Germany followed by Great Britain.\(^77\) When events did not go accordingly, timelines were altered to meet current conditions. Almost always the new estimates were in the short term, within a year or two. Only with the death of Lenin and almost a decade passed with no global revolution did the Soviet Union begin to reevaluate its expectations.

Considering the harsh rhetoric and events coming out of the Russian Revolution, the British had no reason to take the Soviet Union lightly. Certainly this aura of hostility came to play when determining intelligence resources. This expectation of communist revolt in effect led to the biased selection of information. The British knew the rhetoric coming out of the Soviet Union. This meant intelligence regarding it or any socialist-leaning development was open to being preferentially selected and followed. Considering an enormous colony such as India experiencing nationalist protests, the intelligence with Marxist connections would have stuck out like a sore thumb.

A natural outgrowth of the colonial relationship was a superiority complex within British leadership. It gave rise to a very paternal mind set. The British operated on the premise that they knew best, and so ultimately any concessions to the natives would occur on their own prerogative. Officer Olaf Kirkpatrick Caroe would argue in 1918 that self-government in India had to rest on the local foundation. It would have to be representative of the people of India, but

the people would have to be “qualified,” which meant a “proper political education.” Indians felt themselves intellectually equal with the British as more would travel to Britain and attend universities. There was, generally speaking, nothing inherently racist in western philosophy. Many Indians agreed that the British governmental system was one to be emulated, just that the individuals themselves were overbearing and disrespectful. It was a very alienating and condescending mindset, something more and more Indians would lose patience with following Wilson’s Fourteen Points after World War I. The common explanation the British utilized to ward off talk of Indian independence was that the British were simply preparing the Indians for self-rule. They could not turn over a nation as large and diverse, with deep religious and ethnic differences and expect it to be a seamless transition. Instead the British explained that democratic ideals and governance takes time in implementing. The British had for instance allowed the Indian National Congress to exist since 1885. It was growing in prominence, and had been developing a large Indian civil service class to run the affairs of India.

The skeptic could also explain these actions as running an empire on the cheap. Indians occupying bureaucratic positions were cheaper than importing British citizens. Besides, all the most important power wielding positions were occupied by British. Gradual concessions that lead to some increasing roles for Indians were pointed to as evidence that the British were making good on their promises. Minor concessions also served as a stick and carrot proposition to continue to entice Indians to peacefully cooperate with the colonial relationship and ward off the British from having to relinquish power for the foreseeable future. Following World War I the British began running out of excuses for restricting further liberties. Rather than satisfy their

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subjects’ demands they began turning towards more insidious methods of intelligence gathering to gain the upper hand and quell unrest.

Indians living in India were not the only ones drawn to the socialism of the Soviet Union. Rajani Palme Dutt is worth mention in that he would become the leader of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). Dutt was half Indian, the son of an Indian doctor living in Great Britain and a Swedish mother. He experienced frequent racism growing up and it is suspected this influenced his early political thought. Racism caused him to gravitate towards leftist anti-imperialist ideals that focused on class rather than nationality or ethnicity. Dutt was arrested for refusing military service after being drafted in 1916, though he may not have been allowed to participate in the British army anyway due to his mixed race. Shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution he became active in a pro-Communist International faction of the CPGB. Though he was the “least” Indian among the nationalist leaders discussed his ancestry tied him to developments in India. “He was, arguably, the most important figure in the Communist Party of Great Britain” and was “Moscow’s most trusted lieutenant in Britain.” It was a post that invariably brought him into contact with issues regarding revolutionary developments in Britain’s colonies. If being a leading member of Britain’s communist party was not enough to concern officials, his Indian ancestry certainly raised the stakes. It is an example of the British-Indian-Soviet relationships that only contributed to Britain’s concern of Soviet influence in India.

This pro-Communist International support would show Dutt’s revolutionary potential. He advocated direct communist revolution under leadership from the Soviet Union rather than a gradual advocating for workers rights within British law. His loyalty to the Communist

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79 Callaghan, Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism, 10. From an interview Dutt gave Frederick Marks (Public Opinion, June 22, 1951), 1.

80 Callaghan, Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism, 7.
International is perhaps derived from its position on colonial issues, a “matter of ‘race’ equality.” He also subscribed to the belief articulated at the Second Congress of the Communist International that the colony was an “economic drain” in relation to its ruling country. This meant that an empire’s colonies could be used as a tool for revolution. A history of being a radical and his Indian ancestry made him particularly noteworthy from the British government’s perspective.

By 1919 the Bolsheviks had established a new order in Russia. Jawaharlal Nehru expressed the opinion that perhaps western newspapers were not telling the whole truth about Bolshevism. He mistrustfully wrote that “there must be something deeper, something more worth having in these various issues than the newspaper accounts would leave us to believe.” Despite things being reported as anarchy caused by the Bolsheviks, Nehru speculated that there was more to the movement that had driven a revolution, a non-nationalistic one at that. The words emanating from the Soviet Union thus on the one hand were explicitly hostile to the British, while on the other beginning to incite curiosity in a young Indian nationalist movement. The dangerous combination was not lost on Churchill who was reprimanded in late 1919 by his superiors due to his “obsession” with Russia. It is reported to have led him to neglect his other duties and irritated British Prime Minister Lloyd George. As the decade came to a close the British Empire was dealing with unrest in its chief colony and facing an ideological enemy the likes of which the world had never seen. The two were separate at this point, but as the political situation in India continued to deteriorate, the stated goals of one increasingly were matched with

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82 Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism*, 84.
the results in the other. The information leaders relied on was subject to preconceived notions of who the enemy was. In a nation where sheer size made comprehensive political information collection next to impossible, it was prioritized and analyzed in an environment subject to the biases of the popular opinion of its superiors. The British were weary of Bolshevik conspiracies throughout their empire.
Chapter Two: The Height of the Scare
1920-1925

Is the story of Manabendra Nath Roy that of one of the most interesting men in world? As far as Indian nationalists go he was never the force in Indian politics that Gandhi or Nehru were, but as far as ties to the Soviet Union Roy is front and center. He was born as Narendra Nath Bhattacharya in Urbalia, Bengal in 1887. At the age of fourteen he joined the anti-British revolutionary movement in Bengal. From World War I on his travels in pursuit of this goal would take him across the world; from Burma to Indonesia, China, Japan, the Philippines, the United States, Mexico, Germany, and finally the Soviet Union all before returning to India by 1930. It was in the United States that Roy would first discover Marxism in the mid-1910s. While in the US he was arrested, jumped bail, changed his name to evade British intelligence, met a recent Stanford graduate whom he would later marry, and escaped to Mexico. There he founded the Mexican Communist Party, the first communist party outside of the Soviet Union.

Roy would soon be invited by Lenin to Moscow in 1920 to participate in the Second Congress of the Communist International. This first appearance left quite an impression on Lenin as he was able to get some of his writings incorporated into the Congress’ decisions. Roy would become the Head of the Eastern Section on the Presidium of the Communist International and travel to Germany and China to train and then help direct efforts abroad. The delegates of the Second International now included representatives from outside the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Roy recalled part of the allure of the event as one in which “nearly all the languages of the world were heard in the streets of the Soviet capital. For the first time, brown and yellow men met white men who were not overbearing imperialists but friends and comrades, eager to make

85 Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism in India, 11.
amends for the evils of colonialism.”86 International party members felt much more included being treated on an equal plane than many in the colonies had felt in dealing with European leaders.

Roy attended representing the Mexican delegation, as an Indian party had yet to form. While in attendance he sparred with Lenin in discussions about the goals and strategies of the Communist International. By citing Lenin’s 1916 work Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Roy argued that bringing down the most developed capitalist economies in Europe would be made easier by depriving them of their profit source, i.e. their colonies.87 Roy had impressed the delegates with his intellect and knowledge of Marxist ideology. His truly global vision for communism was well received by the Congress. While in attendance Roy wrote an alternative draft of a thesis on the national and colonial question originally written by Lenin. Roy’s version expressed his opinions on the usefulness of depriving Europe of its colonies as the utmost importance and thus even moderate nationalist organizations should be supported. The Congress decided to approve both versions after “Lenin created a sensation by declaring that prolonged discussion with me had made him doubtful about his own Theses; therefore, he proposed that both drafts should be considered together.”88 While inclusionary, this example helps explain the Comintern’s sometimes conflicting directions throughout its existence. Lenin’s thesis asserted that the Communist International should recognize differences in “bourgeois-democratic” movements, with some being revolutionary and others merely “reformist.” The reformist efforts would not attempt a makeover of the economic order of society and so were not worthy of Soviet support.89 It is after this convening of the Communist International that the

87 Roy, M.N. Roy’s Memoirs, 381.
88 Roy, M.N. Roy’s Memoirs, 381.
89 Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism in India, 11.
Soviet Union would at least consider devoting resources towards nationalist movements in the east that were not strictly Marxist.

Locations of Soviet interest now included China, Persia, and India. Individual cases would be considered whether these movements were dominated by communists or more moderate nationalist movements on the belief that revolt would weaken their colonial rulers. It is on this point, the nature of the nationalist movement, which would create the most friction within the Communist International into the future. One on which Lenin, Roy and others did not always see eye to eye as a useful expenditure of resources. One such dissenting voice was Soviet Presidium member Nikolai Bukharin who urged support of even the most outright nationalist movement if “it contributes to the destruction of English imperialism.” The argument over spreading the world revolution vs. solidifying the position of the Soviet Union is one that would cause many to fall victim to Stalin’s purges as party members with a past of supporting non-communist or non-revolutionary organizations.

While Roy represented Mexico at his first Communist International appearance, establishing a Communist Party of India would be one of the first objectives upon leaving the Second Congress. Largely through the influence of Roy, a revolutionary training school with this goal in mind was opened in Kabul, Afghanistan “somewhere about 1920” by him and Abani Nath Mukherji as named in intelligence reports. See Appendix B. Some of those trained there were Muhajirin, a portion of whom subsequently went on to courses in the Eastern University in Moscow. Shortly later the school was moved further north to Tashkent as to not explicitly

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91 Farrington, ed., “6-2-1930, Tashkent,” in Indian Political Intelligence Files: 1912-1950, vol. 4, Communism: Russia, 1922-1938. Names given to particular intelligence files given by me using date and topic. Most IPI documents untitled, and were simply addressed to superiors.

92 As spelled in IPI reports. It is possible this refers to the mujahedeen, Muslim freedom fighters known to have been in Afghanistan in later years.
offend the British as much as such a training school on their border with India would have. The Moscow training “ultimately became the more popular of the two and the Tashkent school was closed several years ago...” as of 1930.93 Just one year into the Communist International significant attention is shown to have shifted to efforts to the east, training and educating revolutionaries with an eye towards India.

While leaders within the Soviet Union debated the merits of supporting strictly communist causes vs. anything that weakened European capitalism, the British sought to stem a strain of each: nationalism in India and a growing Marxist movement at home. Speaking on the role of the communist party in global revolution during the second congress Lenin quoted remarks and debates with English “Comrades” Tanner and McClain.94 These were officials in the British Labour and British Socialist parties respectively.95 In just over a year we see the role of the Communist International expand into a truly international entity. One speech by Lenin was even dedicated to the debate about affiliations the International would have with the British Labour Party.96 What this meant for Britain was that its growing socialist population, the more radical elements to be specific, came to see their own nation’s colonies as deserving of independence as they increased contact with the Communist International. The British government largely dismissed this sentiment as a traitorous element under the influence of the Soviet Union rather than internal opinion turning against their own empire. It set the stage for a showdown of sorts “in the contested ideological battleground that was 1920s India.”97 These

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93 Farrington, ed., “6-2-1930, Tashkent,” in Indian Political Intelligence Files: 1912-1950, vol. 4, Communism: Russia, 1922-1938. See Appendix B.
94 First names not given.
96 Lenin, “Speech on Affiliation to the British Labour Party, Aug. 6,” in Speeches at Congresses of the Communist International 72-80. Again part of the debate on which organizations were worthy of Soviet sponsorship.
connections between the Soviet Union, socialists in Britain, and socialists or nationalists in India came to be a major focus of suspicion for British intelligence efforts.

Following Winston Churchill’s time as Minister of Munitions from 1917-1919, he served as Secretary of State for War and Air from 1919-1921 and Secretary of State for the Colonies 1921-1922. His speeches and positions within the British government display an adamant distrust on all things Bolshevik, describing it as “the subversive movement of socialism.” Churchill’s concerns were not limited to the Soviet threat in a war-weakened Europe however. He suspected the new Soviet Union had eyes for Britain’s colonies and India in particular commenting on January 2, 1920 in some metaphorical language that:

We may abandon – the Allies may abandon – Russia. But Russia will not abandon them. The ghost of the Russian bear comes padding across the immense field of snow. Now it stops outside the Peace Conference in Paris, in silent reproach at their uncompleted task. Now it ranges widely over the enormous countries which lead us to the frontiers of India, disturbing Afghanistan, distracting Persia, and creating far to the southward great agitation and unrest among the hundreds of millions of our Indian population, who have hitherto lived in peace and tranquility under British rule.

Considering the Amritsar Massacre had occurred within the last year the end of that statement could not be more untrue. It displays the type of public denial British officials appeared to be in regarding the independence movement in India. Churchill seems to chalk up Indian unrest to nothing more than the provoking behaviors of a northern neighbor. He was not the only Englishman to view the Bolshevik regime of the Soviet Union with such contempt. Russia, as many still referred to the new Soviet Union, was described as “the enemy of civilization”

according to N.N.E. Bray, an Indian Army Officer and special intelligence officer. Bray would conclude by 1920 that intercepted messages between Moscow and a Soviet agent in Kabul, most likely linked to the training school established by M.N. Roy, suggested that “Soviet propagandists had already penetrated India….these reports offered conclusive proof of Bolsheviks attempts to establish a ‘Soviet India.’” Bray’s influence was felt as his report “Bolshevik Intrigue” was circulated to the Cabinet by Secretary of State of India Edward Montagu in June of 1921. And indeed a number of documents within the Indian Political Intelligence gathered were titled “Bolshevik” or “Communist Intrigue” as addressed to superiors within the intelligence community.

For as much as the Soviets pushed the envelope and adhered to their own agenda, outside forces inevitably would affect Soviet policy both in terms of reactions against events and opportunities to be seized. Following World War I European economies were devastated. The Central Powers of Germany and Austria were hit even harder by the overwhelming burden of war reparations decreed they pay in the final peace treaty signed in Paris in 1919. Lenin spoke highly of the communist parties developing in Germany. He saw Germany as the next domino to fall due to its proximity to the Soviet Union, its deplorable economy, and even perhaps its outrage over Allied decreed reparations. As part of the propaganda the Communist International would release was sentiment such as “there is not a single healthy spot in Europe. Economically, Germany has been thrown back for decades.” The only real benefactors of these realities were the United States, who was left unscathed by the horrors of war, and the newly formed Soviet

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101 N.N.E. Bray, quoted in Fisher, Gentleman Spies: Intelligence Agents in the British Empire and Beyond, 120. Fisher’s work includes an extensive document bibliography, though specific sources not cited in text.  
102 N.N.E. Bray, quoted in Fisher, Gentleman Spies: Intelligence Agents in the British Empire and Beyond, 121.  
103 Fisher, Gentleman Spies: Intelligence Agents in the British Empire and Beyond, 124.  
104 Farrington, ed., Indian Political Intelligence Files: 1912-1950, vol. 4, Communism: Russia, 1922-1938.  
Union, who otherwise might have faced the hostilities of stronger neighbors for adhering to such a threatening ideology.

As 1920 wore on the initial optimistic predictions of Germany undergoing a communist revolution within months appeared less and less likely. Facing the failure of rapid revolution in Europe left the party’s top thinkers scratching their heads at what went wrong. The United States, despite having some initial socialist rumblings in the form of early labor strikes and violent putdowns, flourished under its capitalism and pledged to help rebuild Europe through loans. Great Britain recovered from war fairly quickly as it sustained minimal damage. Its political system experienced Marxist sentiments and its unions grew, but the reality was that any kind of revolutionary sentiment was pacified by relatively minor concessions extended by government and management. Its proletariat class appeared to lack that revolutionary character Marx believed was required and the leadership to bring the class awareness Lenin believed.

With prospects to the west of the Soviet Union looking increasingly bleak, some began to ponder how else to reach the robust industrial workers of the continent. That is when voices such as Roy gained more influence within the Communist International. The thought was to attack Europe ideologically where it is weakest, where its imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism. The influence of Roy could be seen as the words of the Communist International focused more on imperialism and the peoples of the colonies than the previous year. The tone of Lenin shifted quite severely in the Second Congress. Gone is the unbridled optimism and assured victory, and also gone is the clear focus on Europe. In his reports on the international situation, Lenin opened by discussing the sheer volume of people oppressed in the colonies of the five or

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six greatest “most civilized and free” democratic and capitalist nations in the world.\textsuperscript{107} He does this to underscore the masses living under seeming hypocrisy, something that could and should be exploited for the benefit international communism. This shift is one that will continue as the revolution in Europe did not spread as rapidly, or at all, as once believed it would.

While it was true that Europe had the most industrial workers, its capitalists were also firmly in control. World War I had shaken this grasp, especially in Germany, but European capitalism was clearly stronger than expected. The answer for some in the Communist International lied outside of Europe; remember however that this was an organization with international membership. It began to be argued more based on “Lenin’s pamphlet on Imperialism, published just before the War broke out in 1914,\textsuperscript{108} [it] maintained that colonial expansion reinforced the foundation of the bourgeois order in Europe and delayed its inevitable downfall according to the prophecy of Karl Marx.”\textsuperscript{109} In other words, Europe’s economy had been propped up long before the war from its vast colonial possessions.

The colonies of Great Britain, France, even Germany continued to siphon capital into Europe. Regarding India in particular “the plundering of the country’s great natural wealth is English imperialism’s chief source of power,” so declared official Comintern memoranda.\textsuperscript{110} This saving grace is in partly why Lenin dubbed imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism.\textsuperscript{111} The war had not cost Europe’s major powers their colonies, though President Wilson’s proclamations of national self-determination did resonate strongly in the colonies of the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[108] Though my sources cite the year of publication as 1916.
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world. Perhaps it was here that the grasp on the colonies first began to truly weaken. Great
Britain certainly feared this and saw the most compelling action in this direction in India
following World War I. Dubbed the Great Imperial War by Soviet leaders, World War I was a
watershed moment in the history of colonial rule. And while the colonies perhaps saved
European capitalism in the face of the communist threat from the Soviet Union, they also would
grow to become a major headache in the years to come. India was not alone in experiencing
nationalism as movements arose in the Middle East, Turkey, and China.

So in what perhaps was an ironic twist of fate, the strength of capitalism in the eyes of the
Soviets was also its weakness. While the colonies propped up Europe, they also represented a
possible weakness in their political structure according to Soviet thought. They were a
hypocritical weakness that could be exploited. The growing classes of educated in the colonies
saw the self-pronounced strength of western nations in democracy. Their home colonial
countries could not become the best they could without their own democracy, their own
independence. These discrepancies were something the Soviet Union could exploit, with their
own communist tinge on matters.

A new hope of the Soviet Union for spreading communism into the colonies would be
that a communist overthrow in India would give the Soviet Union a strong ally to second its
claim of communism being the future and would irreversibly damage its former ruling country,
Great Britain.\footnote{See Chattopadhyay, “The Bolshevik Menace: Colonial Surveillance and the Origins of Socialist Politics in Calcutta” \textit{South Asia Research} 26 no.2 (2006): 165-179.} The seeds of communism would then grow up into the working classes of the
home country while still experiencing pressure exerted directly by the Communist International.
At the very least it was an alternate model for the global revolution to begin.\footnote{Lenin, “Report of the Commission on the National and the Colonial Questions,” in \textit{Speeches at Congresses of the Communist International}, 55.} Perhaps this was
merely a desperate attempt to apply the teachings of Karl Marx. Had revolution followed in this manner it would have been the opposite of what Marx believed was the way for communism to develop. Soviet leaders however could not bear to admit that the doctrine in which they had been fighting under had been wrong. Besides, what did it really matter the order or means as long as the final product was the same?

The Soviet Union believed it had a reasonable chance of success in the colonies for a number of reasons. Local populations already had resentment towards their imperial rulers. Nationalist tendencies were already beginning to boil over in some places. Leaders argued since Russia was heavily a peasant society going into the revolution, the Soviet model could be better applied to the colonies than to the economies of Western Europe. Peasants would form the backbone of a communist overthrow of the colonial government. This would begin the process of communist revolution on a global scale, and weaken the economies of Europe’s more firmly entrenched and developed capitalist economies.

Perhaps the most visible link demonstrating the Soviet Union’s influence on Indian politics was through the Communist Party of India. The party was officially recognized by the Communist International in 1921, though at this time it was based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan and not in India. It took guidance from the Communist International in Moscow regarding labor or consumer strikes to support or reject, levels of cooperation that should be undertaken with other Indian socialist factions, and efforts to unite all Indian socialists under communism. The party would struggle to effectively establish itself in India, but at least as early as 1921 an entity proclaiming its aims of communist revolution for India existed. The fact however that leaders such as Churchill were on record as saying the Soviet Union was directly influencing unrest in India and that officials within the Government of India received reports of “Bolshevik Intrigue”

in India, and yet there was not even a communist party established within the nation of hundreds of millions testifies to the extent that Soviet rhetoric had raised the perceived threat in India without much in terms of substantiated intelligence and a vocal Indian communist leadership to prove it. In the coming years intelligence on Soviet influence within India would dramatically increase, but how much of it is because actual Soviet activity increased, and how much of it was because the British focused on it at the detriment of other intelligence gathering?

During these early years of the 1920s British intelligence had been keeping tabs on left leaning organizations, from trade unions to the Communist Party of Great Britain and efforts to establish a party in India. Churchill would also be moved from the War Cabinet to the Colonial Office in February of 1921. No longer did his duties put him in direct responsibility of the Soviet Union, where he had been coordinating anti-Bolshevik efforts as during the three years of Russian Civil War that broke out following Bolshevik consolidation in 1918. But now the Empire’s most vocal opponent of the Soviet Union was involved in colonial policy. It is naive to think he would not have brought his prior suspicions and hostilities with him to his new position. Other British leaders though would echo much of the sentiment of Churchill as Secretary of State for India Edwin Montagu in June of 1921 spoke in terms bordering on panic regarding the “immediate threat from the Russian Bolshevik regime.”115 While India experienced nationalist agitation for independence, leadership continually had an eye on any kind of foreign Bolshevik influence.

British intelligence did not just have its hands full at home, but abroad too. The government of India generated an “astounding amount of paperwork: correspondence, reports, circulars, censuses and all matter of other supervisory documents.”116 Not only were intelligence

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116 Muldon, _Empire, Politics and the Creation of the 1935 India Act_, 32.
officials expected to keep up with collecting new information, but to assess and analyze it too, a “Herculean task, one that distracted local officials from cultivating potential sources, and often resulted in the production of reports that were pro-forma.” 117 Interwar intelligence gathering did nothing to lighten this load, and that continual reports “could not help, therefore, but be selective, reductive and even unintentionally misleading…the Government of India did not possess the manpower, funds or legal sanction necessary to carry out a full-scale operation of surveillance and infiltration of the nationalist movement.” 118 What this meant is that intelligence operations had to be selective. Certain groups or individuals whose activities were seen as more “seditious” were prioritized because larger scale nationalist marches or mass meetings were more difficult to cover and thus pinpoint responsibility. 119 This meant that “much of this intelligence was fragmentary,” and had to be stitched together by overworked British officials. 120 The conclusion of an understaffed intelligence agency that had to consider priorities, together with very strong anti-Soviet rhetoric within British government, and anti-colonial rhetoric from the Soviet Union must have played a role in what caught the attention of intelligence officers. This could explain the disproportionate amount of attention spent on communist intrigue in India considering its impact in retrospect.

The Indian Political Intelligence (IPI) was a division within the India Office in London. It was the agency employed to assess the political situation in India, and while it was officially created before World War I (1912), the number of documents regarding Soviet influence saw a serious jump by 1922. It was supported and fed information from the Intelligence Bureau in Delhi, various Criminal Investigation Departments of each province, and the British domestic

117 Muldon, Empire, Politics and the Creation of the 1935 India Act, 32.
118 Muldon, Empire, Politics and the Creation of the 1935 India Act, 33-34.
119 Muldon, Empire, Politics and the Creation of the 1935 India Act, 35.
120 Fisher, Gentleman Spies: Intelligence Agents in the British Empire and Beyond, 115
agency New Scotland Yard. IPI information would be transmitted to London to the Foreign Office for analyzing. It was along these avenues of communication that the British assigned varying levels of threat, connected dots, and determined what action would be necessary to take. Indian Political Intelligence collected information on all things politics in India, and had extensive records on various degrees of left leaning movements, whether they be broadly socialist or specifically Marxist. These files included notes if they were independent Indian communists or had ties to the Soviet Union. Intelligence findings built cases incriminating various individuals. The names that appear in various files attest to that as Gandhi, Nehru, Roy, and Bose all make at least cameo appearances, and in the case of Roy, major roles indeed.

The Indian Political Intelligence Files represent a treasure trove of documents detailing the surveillance efforts the British government in India utilized on spying on any possible threats to their rule. The number of documents total in the thousands, and to underscore the degree to which they targeted communist and direct ties to the Soviet Union specifically, entire sections have been organized and collected regarding “Russia” or the communist parties of Great Britain and India. See Appendix L. These files include reports on various goings on in India between the decades of the 1920s and 1930s. Some examples of the many files are intercepted telegraphs between various trade and labor unions in India, and either their counterparts in England suspected of having connections with the Soviet Union, or with Moscow itself. Soviet sponsored banks figure largely into the equation here, along with remittances sent between individuals and organizations across international lines. Along with money, arms were also tracked, probably the

121 Muldon, Empire, Politics and the Creation of the 1935 India Act, 33.
122 Farrington, ed., Indian Political Intelligence Files: 1912-1950.
123 I collected 998 images of documents on microfiche slides from IPI 4 and IPI 6, but many of those images contained 2 documents if they were clear enough to read from a zoomed out view in the image reader. The total in these two collections numbers well over 1,000. With 17 IPI collections, the total number of IPI documents surely totals in the thousands with varying amounts of documents in each collection.
two most important parts of supporting a revolution. Other examples of Soviet intrigue were documented by the IPI, including training schools in Central Asia and Moscow. Strategic resources too as Soviet oil and British distribution of oil had extensive coverage. The examples included here are just a small taste of a very interesting and robust collection of intelligence information that shows the types of details the British were able to track in India, and gives insight into the information British leaders would have been privy.

Among the earliest IPI reports on Soviet influence it was reported that over 120,000 pounds sterling had passed through M.N. Roy’s hands by November of 1922. The report speculated however that much of the money was pocketed by intermediaries and terrorist groups who were more interested in Russian money than Comintern politics. The Indian Political Intelligence files also include evidence that the British were aware of direct Soviet efforts to fund banks and trade unions sympathetic to socialist organization both in Great Britain and in India. Just one example is in a document explaining that “further details have come to light as the result of inquiry into sixty-three Bank of England pound notes…which have been traced to India. It is now certain these note came into India via Kabul, and it seems equally certain that that they arrived at Kabul via Moscow and the Kabul Soviet Legation.” See Appendix C. This evidence would point in the direction of a money-laundering type scheme where these organizations would then funnel the money to more direct political organizations with the aims of fomenting a socialist or communist revolution in India. The monies here most likely would have originated from the Communist International and its proceedings in Moscow. These documents reveal the mounting evidence the British collected regarding direct involvement, and would have confirmed prior suspicions.

It was not just underground counterfeit operations being traced to Moscow, but there seems to have been a legitimate side of things. The establishment in India of branches of the State Bank of the USSR is discussed in letters exchanged between British officials. One such letter refers to a local branch opening in Bombay, and described it as an “agency” of the Soviet bank.\textsuperscript{126} See Appendix D. Such agents of the Soviet Bank apparently had been tracked in other cities in India and back into London as well. British officials saw growing connections between financial institutions at home and in its colonies to a state operated bank from Moscow. The banks have “been kept under secret observation from time to time since the signing of the Trade Agreement with Soviet Russia,\textsuperscript{127} as the transactions of the Soviet Government in this country appeared to show that they were using their accounts in these banks to for the purpose of financing revolutionary movements here and in the colonies.”\textsuperscript{128} See Appendix E. It did not take a leap of faith to draw conclusions that such institutions were not just banking enterprises but avenues to fund and support local trade and union organizations, in addition to any suspected communist organizations the British would have believed to be in existence. A number of IPI files track remittances, funds sent across international boundaries between individuals or organizations. In this case they were used to pinpoint sources of Soviet intrusion into banking or political organizations.

Increasingly the Soviet Union represented more than an ideological threat, but was actively supporting destabilizing and potential revolutionary organizations. It is difficult to assess

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\item\textsuperscript{126} Farrington, ed., “10-26-1923, Bombay USSR Bank,” in \textit{Indian Political Intelligence Files: 1912-1950}, vol. 4, Communism: Russia, 1922-1938.
\item\textsuperscript{127} Signed in 1921, such a trade agreement was allowed by the USSR as part of the New Economic Policy initiated in 1921 by Vladimir Lenin, who called it state capitalism. In it, the Soviet Union softened its hard line communist economic policy in hopes of stimulating the economy. It allowed for small private business and profit making while the state controlled banks and large industry. The NEP was officially ended in 1928 with the ascension of Joseph Stalin as head of the Soviet Union. Nielson, \textit{Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939}, 43.
\end{itemize}
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how successful the British believed these Soviet attempts were. As there was limited success at fomenting communist revolution early in the 1920s, stemming results seems to be far less of a concern than confirming intentions. Intentions were all the British needed. After all, they had no way of knowing for sure if they knew the extent of the Soviet presence in internal Indian affairs.

The indirect connections between Indian nationalists and the Soviet Union was largely something the British could not limit as most of it was ideological alternatives to the British system. The prominence of the Soviet Union brought knowledge of the ideas it was founded on to a wider global audience simply through newspaper reports, travel and word of mouth, and visibility. This sort of influence is evident in some of the writings and speeches of various Indian nationalist leaders. But what the British could prevent, or at least assess with some certainty, is this sort of direct assistance emanating from within the Soviet Union. Perhaps this is fed into the psyche of the British official that Bolshevik conspiracies were everywhere, but for a world power wanting to maintain control over its empire, the collection of this intelligence filled a gap of direct linkings between the two that never could be proved regarding the indirect means.

The Communist International for its part continued to convene and issue documentation addressed to governments and organizations outside of Europe. A good deal pertain to China as a fledgling struggle between Chiang Kai-Shek and Mae Zedong was underway in the 1920s. Some other examples include a letter sent to the Indian National Congress in December of 1922.129 It implores the Congress to order the releases of a number of young Indians who had been arrested following training at the military school in Tashkent and at the University for Toilers of the East in Moscow, stating that “the ferocity of this judicial murder is unsurpassed even in the bloody

129 Degras, ed., “Appeal from the ECCI and the RILU to all workers against death sentences passed in India,” in The Communist International: 1919-1943 Documents, vol. 2, 11. While it is not known if the INC had the authority to release these men, it appears the request to release prisoners was an excuse to write a propaganda message to the Indian National Congress.

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history of British rule in India.”¹³⁰ Yes, apparently such an institution existed under that name. The letter then goes on with some fairly strong language, probably doing more harm to their cause than good. It states that “British rule can and will be overthrown only by a violent revolution” and says that the peaceful path preached by Gandhi would end in failure.

In a debate regarding eastern potential the Communist International described the actions of the west following World War I as forgetting “their promises and turned with fresh and unexampled force to the throttling of India, the robbing of China, the division of Turkey, and the enslaving of Persia...Remember that in this selfless struggle you are not alone.”¹³¹ By ending with a pledge of support, the Soviet Union is displaying at least in rhetoric that it is not only concerned with Europe, but the entire world. Time and time again the British hear stated hostility to overthrow their rule all the while they gathered information confirming Soviet intentions. The British had the motivations correct, and the existence, it is the magnitude of influence that may have been overstated as the result of erring on the side of caution. For a government under-funded and under staffed in India, it would have distracted from assessing the larger threat to their rule, that of genuine homegrown Indian nationalism.

Churchill’s feelings of Moscow certainly did not disappear and it is not a stretch to imagine this influenced policy in the Foreign Office. He spoke of foreign agents penetrating the British government, subverting society, and plotting to take over the world. Then in 1924 information came to light which seemed to vindicate the suspicions of many. The Daily Mail in Britain published a secret letter supposedly penned by Gregory Zinoviev, the head of the Communist International, addressed to the Communist Party of Great Britain instructing them to

push for the ratification of the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement and to establish cells within the British army. The letter reads “it would be desirable to have cells in all units of the troops, particularly among those quartered in the large centres of the country, and among factories working on munitions and at military store depots.”\footnote{132} This bombshell of a letter went on to say “it is indispensable to stir up the masses of the British proletariat to bring into movement the army of unemployed proletarians...”\footnote{133} The Zinoviev Letter as it would come to be known even mentions the colonies, offering assistance that “the I.K.K.I. (Executive Committee, Third International) will willingly place at your disposal the wide material in its possession regarding activities of British Imperialism in the Middle and Far East.”\footnote{134} This evidence put on display for all the British public and leadership that surely would prove the active, deliberate Bolshevik conspiracies that many had suspected. The threat also confirmed was not just at home, but in the colonies too. There is one problem with this seemingly irrefutable proof however, the letter is now known to have been a forgery.\footnote{135}

The letter served short term electoral benefits to the majority Tory Party in the British Parliament, but also long-term vindication for those who refused to accept the Soviet Union as a menacing entity that was there to stay. It raised the stakes for warding off the growing tide of communism, and strengthened the questioning of loyalties at home. Regarding the socialists in Great Britain Churchill said that “the socialists can think of nothing but Moscow. They look upon it with admiration, almost adoration...My objection to the Russian loan is not alone on the grounds of prudence or profit; it has also been based upon moral grounds.”\footnote{136} He remained on
edge regarding Britain’s colonies, and focused on the threat to Great Britain itself describing the prospects of the Soviet Union as follows:

Behind Socialism stands Communism. Behind Communism stands Moscow, that dark, sinister, evil power which has made its appearance in the world – a band of cosmopolitan conspirators gathered from the underworld of Europe and America – which has seized the great Russian people by the hair of their heads and holds them in a grip, robbing them of victory, prosperity, of freedom. This plagues band of conspirators are aiming constantly to overthrow all civilized countries and reduce every nation to the level of misery to which they have plunged the great people of Russia. They strike everywhere, by every method, through every channel which is open them, but there is no country at which they strike so much as this island of ours.

At the Fifth Congress of the Communist International in 1924 India was again mentioned as a place where the “constitutional illusions and hopes of reconciliation among the enslaved masses are fading.” Representatives of foreign communist parties increasingly played larger roles at these congresses. Some interesting names appear in its annals, with one Ho Chi Minh addressing the organization in 1924. The Indian portion of the communist party still struggled to gain traction. Actual membership in the Indian Communist Party is difficult to ascertain as was reported only 78 members comprised its initial formation in 1925. One member did not know whether to “laugh or cry.” But various labor unions with membership in the tens of thousands could be claimed as communist leadership by supporters of Marxism in India.

137 Apparently Churchill’s use of the disease metaphor for the Bolsheviks was one of his favorites. Carlton, Churchill and the Soviet Union, 20.
141 Dates have conflicted regarding initial founding, of the Communist Party of India, with 1921, 1925, 1928, and 1933 with various qualifications to justify the date given.
142 Callaghan, Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism, 102.
The ideological reasoning behind turning east was shaky at best according to classic Marxism, but the practicality was not. Though the east did not have the established industrial working classes that communism was supposed to have been founded upon, it did provide a safety-net of sorts for maintaining the strength of European capitalism. The Soviet Union also was not attempting to introduce Marxism into lands completely devoid of an education on the subject. In India there was growing awareness of socialism simply through young Indians who had the luxury of a European education by means of their connection with Britain. Young nationalist leaders looked to the Soviet Union in its first decade of existence with an optimism that a positive alternative to colonial rule had formed in Europe, one which was ideologically friendlier to colonial nations such as India. The British knew that communism threatened their colonial holdings on ideological grounds. As the IPI files have shown, they also had collected extensive evidence that the Soviet Union was actively seeking to foment communists in India. Where the greatest threat came from they were not sure, but knew the tangible efforts by the Soviets would be easier to combat than that of the idea. This was something they could not do with the growing nationalist sentiment in India. The assistance of the Soviet Union was something that could be stopped if that was indeed what was fomenting Indian dissent. Preventing feelings of Indian pride and desire for independence was largely out of British control.

The nation and colony began developing a relationship of mutual interest. The Soviet Union continued its turn towards colonial lands such as India as an avenue for spreading communism, at least in rhetorical support, while India saw in the Soviet Union a system which would allow it to exit the imperial world system. While to varying degrees this relationship never came to fruition, it alarmed the British nonetheless who saw their role in India under attack from these separate interests. The main question the British had was how could they stop these trends;

Indian nationalism, and Bolshevik communism? The thought that the two could and were combining terrified the colonial office to the point that it set up a specific agency to track it. For most Indians, independence was of paramount concern. What would allow it to occur swiftest, with greatest chance of success, or with least bloodshed? If there was a possibility communism could do this it would be discussed. Leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru would educate themselves on the topic and thought about how it would apply to India.

Gandhi, the largest presence in the nationalist movement had sympathetic statements on the concept of communism. For anything to rise to prominence during independence it would need Gandhi’s blessing. For Jawaharlal Nehru, seen by many as Gandhi’s apprentice of sorts, communism, or at least socialism in some form was very appealing. This was especially true early in the nationalist push when the idealism of Lenin’s young Soviet Union had yet to be largely spoiled by Stalin in the years to come. For others such as Manabendra Nath Roy, an actual member of the Communist Party, the Soviet Union represented a range of possibilities regarding the future of India. Despite the ultimate failure of Soviet style communism in India, leftist influences were abound throughout the nationalist movement and were seen by the British to explain their own loosening grasp on the country, see Churchill’s previous statements tying unrest in India to the Soviet presence to the north.144

Although Gandhi was not the founder of Indian nationalism, he was far and away the largest figure in it. His experiences and understanding with socialism were formed throughout the experiences of his life as socialism in practice came to develop throughout Gandhi’s lifetime. Born in 1869, he was educated as a lawyer in Great Britain before becoming a civil rights lawyer in another British possession; South Africa. Already as a young man Gandhi had accumulated experience living in three different places around the world; India, Britain, and South Africa.

144 See page 43 of this text.
During subsequent years in South Africa he began to develop quite a reputation for defending Indian rights among the large Indian migrant community there. Gandhi was not always advocating for the ouster of the British either. He was loyal to the British government during the Boer War in South Africa of 1903-4. But the longer he fought for the rights of the people, the more outspoken he realized he needed to be to make real change.\footnote{See Fulop-Miller, 	extit{Lenin and Gandhi}, for an interesting take on Tolstoy’s influence on Gandhi.}

What began emerging out of his work as a young lawyer were his philosophies on non-violence. He utilized words such as satyagraha, or truth-force, and began connecting sentiments of what it means to be Indian with expanding political rights. It began to sound nationalist, and is one of the reasons his stature continued to grow despite his shy personality and polite demeanor. Early in his career he was not known as a particularly skilled lawyer, but he garnered respect for his philosophies among Indians and British alike. English publicist Percival Landon said “Gandhi is more than a religious revivalist and a holy man, he is a Mahatma, to whom almost divine attributes are ascribed; there is no one like him in the word today.”\footnote{Fulop-Miller, 	extit{Lenin and Gandhi}, 166.} As the 1910s progressed Gandhi took up cases not just involving Indian rights but worker’s rights and rural interests, as often they were one in the same. It is here Gandhi would have the most exposure to socialist sentiment and application during the operation of his Tolstoy Farm community in South Africa-another interesting Russian-Indian connection.\footnote{See Fulop-Miller, 	extit{Lenin and Gandhi}.}

As World War I came to a close and violent outbursts of Indian nationalism came with the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, Gandhi saw a void in leadership. By 1920 Bal Gangadhar Tilak had passed away and the title of leader for Indian independence was open. Gandhi came to assume leadership as the de facto leader of the Indian nationalist movement. Regarding the new ideology that threatened the British so much, Gandhi recognized the appeal communism had for
a colonial country such as India and the hope the new Soviet Union represented for many Indians. What leaders such as Gandhi and others saw in the new Soviet Union is a nation that denounced the practice of imperialism and had deep roots in socialism. That stance alone would be enough to garner the curiosity of outsiders regardless of their understandings of communism, both its theory and its practice and methods.

The most important Indian nationalist leader to actually spend a good deal of time and status and effort into considering the Soviet model for India was Jawaharlal Nehru. India’s first prime minister and Gandhi protégé had definite socialist influences in his politics. Nehru came out of an elite background. His father, also an influential voice in Indian politics, brought him up with a liberal western education. He attended Trinity College in Cambridge where he received a degree with honors in the natural sciences. He spent additional years in London studying for the bar until becoming a lawyer in 1912. Nehru had showed an interest in politics early on, having expressed criticism and impatience of moderates in Indian politics. Chiefly, he disliked the continual pledges of loyalty to the British crown. Learning liberal thought, Nehru saw a clear contradiction between the freedoms associated with western government and the imperial British rule in India.

He was first and foremost a nationalist at this point, as he would largely remain so throughout his life. His time in Cambridge exposed him to socialist ideas, “but it was all very academic” at this point. And Nehru, unlike Gandhi, never really had the strong religious sentiment. Upon leaving London he relocated to Allahabad and worked under his father at his law practice. During the following years Nehru continued to see himself as a nationalist purely, but socialist ideals kept speaking to him in the back of his mind. He would go on to write that “I

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am a socialist and a republican, and am no believer in kings and princes…”  

While far from stating he is a Soviet communist, he at least includes the word socialist. It is an indication such left-leaning affiliations were becoming more prominent and accepted in everyday politics.

Rajani Palme Dutt, the British communist with Indian ancestry, helped lead the British party from the 1920s into the 1960s and was as well read inside the communist world as out. He would “become the principle link – between the Communist International, the Communist Party of Great Britain, and Communist parties in many parts of the British Empire – notably the Indian subcontinent.” The Fifth Congress of the Communist International after all had “devolved responsibility to the CPGB” regarding India. And although he supported these movements ideologically, Dutt was not an Indian citizen and so the real influences from the Indian perspective lies elsewhere. His main concern was in his home, Great Britain. Here is an example of someone who saw socialism as a possibility in India, supported and was partially involved with it, but never made it his chief point to sell it to the people there.

As the midway point in the 1920s passed, the mutual interest between the Soviet Union and India continued to develop from the beginning of the decade. Though Nehru had expressed distrust at western reports of the Bolsheviks in 1919, he had yet to garner any first-hand experience on the topic. Indian nationalism was undergoing its own ebbs and flows with Gandhi continuing his rise to prominence. Others with stronger ties to communism and India such as Dutt and Roy had minimal impact within the nation itself. During this time the Soviet Union was more explicit with its intentions for the East, and India specifically. Its leaders voiced support for growing sentiment there and the Communist International increased efforts in the form of funding and rhetoric. In the larger picture however, the very basic step of establishing an Indian

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150 Nehru, “Presidential address to the Lahore Congress, quoted in Dutt, Socialism of Jawaharlal Nehru, xiii.
151 Callaghan, Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism, 8.
152 Callaghan, Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism, 102.
Communist Party within the borders of India had still failed. The British, who knew from the start the Soviet Union was an enemy of capitalism, reassigned much needed resources within their intelligence services to assess the strength of the Soviet influence in India. While they gathered evidence proving what they suspected to find, they also displayed a priority to the communist threat over that of the much larger Indian nationalist movement in general. The Empire’s efforts to explain unrest increasingly relied on intelligence that was focused on external threats rather than internal developments.
Chapter Three: Interest and Disinterest

1926-1943

By the latter half of the 1920s British intelligence services were in full swing. The Soviet Union had been working to establish a communist party and support trade and labor unions for over five years. The Communist International however had lost Vladimir Lenin in 1924, one of its biggest supporters. Stalin began to emerge at the center of the Soviet power vacuum while other founding revolutionaries and believers of the importance of international communism lost influence, and some, their lives. Even while the beginning of this period saw the Soviet Union lose its degree of interest in India, the processes that alarmed the British and caused the preferential treatment of Soviet intelligence in India was building off previous years. British intelligence had established leads, knew names, and had followed the money trail. These developments did not just dry up, and so the flow of Soviet incriminating evidence continued. For Indian nationalists, the early 1920s acted as a period to educate themselves on the Soviet Union as well. For surely somebody the British hated so much was worth their curiosity. As leftist groups made their first initial inroads in India, the Marxist ideology began to catch the attention of some of the most prominent leaders.

Into the mid-1920s Churchill continued to speak out against the motivations of the Soviet Union. Despite India still failing to form a single communist party, and no other European nations falling to communism, Churchill continued to be on edge, referring to the Bolsheviks as:

Those miscreants who have ruined their country are powerless in their efforts to ruin ours. In their plans of word revolution they find this island an obstacle. If they could only pull down Britain, ruin its prosperity, plunge it into anarchy, and obliterate the British Empire as a force in the world, they are convinced that the road will be clear for general butchery, followed by universal tyranny of which they will be the head, and out of which they will get the profits.153

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Winston Churchill had lost none of his ill-will towards the Soviet Union to say the least. He would write in 1927 to Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India, and suggest that a sub-committee be formed to examine the “menace” to India, referring to the Soviet Union. It is unclear the degree to which the British were aware of internal developments in the Soviet Union, and so from their perspective the mounting intelligence on influence in India only continued to rise.

It would not be until later in the 1920s that prominent leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru would articulate their opinions on communism and the Soviet Union. Gandhi would in fact comment upon it a great deal. In a 1926 piece in an Indian newspaper Gandhi writes that “socialism is a beautiful word, and so far as I am aware, in socialism all the members of society are equal—none low, none high.” At another time Gandhi even says “I may tell you that I am trying my best to live up to the ideal of Communism in the best sense of the term.” Gandhi recognized the appeal to the masses such a doctrine would have, and suggests that the ideal of communism is worth emulating. Already however this could be interpreted as a slight at the Soviet Union. Perhaps being the only communist nation, it was not living up to the best sense of the term.

A philosophy such as communism which abolishes private property could have been seen by Gandhi as truer to the human experience. He goes on to write “non-possession is allied to non-stealing. A thing not originally stolen must be classified as stolen property if we possess it without needing it.” Put in this way communism appealed not just politically, but morally too as it advocated not living beyond one’s means. Gandhi was known for his minimalist ways, in

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attire, in food, in lifestyle. The concept of equal distribution of wealth could be seen as something Gandhi could apply his philosophies to. It would mean “each man shall have the wherewithal to supply all his natural needs and no more…A society based on non-violence cannot nurture any other ideal. We may not perhaps be able to realize the goal, but we must bear it in mind and work unceasingly to near it.”

157 It is precisely that idealism which intrigued Gandhi about the Soviet Union. It is why it would not have been a stretch if the British saw this interest develop into a more serious relationship between their largest colony and a chief rival. The Soviet Union was, if nothing else, a grand experiment in idealism.

What these quotes do not do however is suggest that Gandhi believed it was the role of any form of government to prescribe such egalitarian goals. While Gandhi’s personal philosophy may have had similarities to that of the idealism of communism, Gandhi nonetheless interacted with and worked on behalf of individuals of diverse political beliefs and personal backgrounds. While advocating peaceful resistance to British rule Gandhi was financially supported by wealthy industrialists. He drew “heavily on the business elite and urban professional groups for his mass movements and constructive programmes.”

158 Surely peaceful Indian independence was the chief concern to Gandhi, not social revolution. He was not one to impose his will on others, merely lead by example. If the wealthy supported his efforts, so be it, Gandhi was not one to exclude. If he felt uncomfortable supporting something, rather than eliminate opposition he would remove himself as he did from the nationalist movement for a time in the 1920s. This decision resulted from the major moral qualms about being associated with a movement that experienced increased violence and deaths. Gandhi refused to be a part of that.

Gandhi ultimately found the communist manifestation of socialism in Russia to be irreconcilable with India for a number of reasons. Some of the biggest reasons lie in the seeming split between words and actions in the Soviet Union. For Gandhi, the means of achieving a goal were just as important as reaching the goal itself. If it could not be achieved humanely, it would permanently tarnish the goal and make the end result no better than what was being protested. He cites the Soviet Union’s lack of humanity; specifically that “the needs of the spirit have to be kept in view along with the needs of the body.”¹⁵⁹ This obviously does not meld well with the atheistic trends in Marxism. Throughout Gandhi’s writings are justifications based on the preservation and cleansing of the human soul, of spirituality, and of God. While Gandhi was educated in the West he most certainly was spiritually grounded in the East. Religion continued to be of paramount importance in India.

Other specific differences exist between Gandhi’s political philosophies and those of communism, and that fact should be clear so as to not overstate the Soviet Union’s impact on Indian politics. Some include communism’s assertion that the main driving force in history has been economic, that of property and production. Gandhi believed more in what can be described as a holistic-spiritual approach. Love for fellow human beings was the instinct which drove people, a love-force. This leads to non-violence, as “any record down to our own time we shall find that man has been steadily progressing towards Ahimsa (non-violence)…it follows that it has to progress towards it further.”¹⁶⁰ Another sticking point to which Gandhi would never make concession to is use of violence as a tool. Lenin believed that the ends justified the means, something made clear with the violent tactics such as the Red Terror and the formation of a

secret police force employed to ensure the continuing revolution in Russia.\textsuperscript{161} Since the means of achieving a goal were everything to Gandhi, he withdrew his participation in the national movement after violence failed to cease on the part of protestors and British officials alike. Gandhi stopped his involvement and later accepted a six year prison sentence, effectively removing himself from national politics for the time.

Gandhi and his ideas had mass appeal, some of which overlapped with the mass appeal of communism. In reality however, Gandhi reached much of his politics independently and was as or more opposed to communism for India, especially its Soviet manifestation, as he was to British rule. This reality however does show that while not all nationalist leaders had strong socialist connections fed by the Soviet Union, they were still operating within a political environment that required them to consider and comment on the political possibilities represented by the Soviet Union. Even in the rejection of the Soviet Union, a leader such as Gandhi was forced to contend with supporters and sympathizers of the Soviet Union such as Nehru, and frame his reasoning to rebuff what he saw as faulty with that ideology. All of this occurred in the context of leading an independence movement against Great Britain, and so any talk of alternative government reeked of political unrest and would have raised the suspicions of the colonial government regarding the Soviet Union.

Jawaharlal Nehru’s story is linked closer to that of the Soviet Union than Gandhi. He was much more openly socialist leaning than Gandhi too and looked to the Soviet Union for inspiration much more directly. With Nehru, there are both direct and indirect examples of the Soviet Union in his life. His journey to Moscow first took him to places across Europe such as Venice, Switzerland, and Berlin in 1926. These trips served both to make acquaintances with

\textsuperscript{161} See Peter Kenez, \textit{A History of the Soviet Union From the Beginning to the End} (Cambridge University Press, 2006).
Indian political exiles, but also to connect with political organizations sympathetic to Indian independence. He would go on to visit and write about the Soviet Union by 1927. This trip immediately followed his attendance to the International Congress Against Imperialism held in Brussels, Belgium earlier that year where he represented the Indian National Congress. The future Prime Minister soon after wrote about his visit to Moscow in a series of sixteen short articles published in The Hindu, an Indian nationalist publication, in 1928.

The articles covered a wide range of topics from Nehru’s impressions of the Soviet Union at the ten year anniversary of the Russian Revolution, to explaining the Soviet system, to various social institutions in Russia such as education, criminals, and peasants. Describing Russian women Nehru writes, “whatever other failings of the Russian women of today may have, she is certainly not a chattel or plaything of man. She is independent, aggressively so, and refuses to play second fiddle to man.” Such comments must be kept in mind to consider the audience Nehru was writing for. It would have been a largely Indian audience curious about the society of not just this alternative to British rule, a “great experiment” as he and others have called the Soviet Union, but this remaking of social the relationships that developed as a result.

He explained this innate curiosity as follows:

It is difficult to feel indifferent towards Russia, and it is still more difficult to judge of her achievements and her failures impartially. She is today too much of a live wire to be touched without a violent reaction, and those who write about her can seldom avoid superlatives of praise and denunciation. Much depends on the angle of vision and philosophy of life of the observer; much also depends on the

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162 Dutt, Socialism of Jawaharlal Nehru, 31.
164 Nehru, Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, 381-389. Article titles include “The Fascination of Russia,” “The Journey,” and “Impressions of Moscow.”
prejudices and pre-conceived notions which he brings to his task. But whichever view may be right no one can deny the fascination of this strange Eurasian country of the hammer and sickle, where workers and peasants sit on thrones of the mighty and upset the best-laid schemes of mice and men.

For us in India the fascination is even greater, and even our self-interest compels us to understand the vast forces which have upset the old order of things and brought a new world into existence, where values have changed utterly and old standards have given place to new... If we desire to find a solution for these problems we shall have to venture along new avenues of thought and search for new methods... Russia thus interests us because it may help us find some solution for the great problems which face the world today.168

Nehru knew the majority of India knew little of the Soviet system. If he was to influence a future for India to move in the socialist direction of a style of governance, it would not have been useful to demonize the Soviet Union, the world’s lone socialist nation at the time. To assuage common fears of Russia, Nehru writes “Indians have been told for generations to fear Russia and it is perhaps a little difficult to exorcise this fear today. But if we face the facts we can only come to one conclusion, and that is that India has nothing to fear from Russia.”169 Nehru here is competing with the very loud British voices in India that paint a very one-sided, dark picture of the Soviet Union. It was a rivalry between the British and the Russian Empire going back to the Great Game over influence in Central Asia since the early 19th century.

Nehru did not completely ignore the negative, however, but when he did acknowledge the dark sides of Soviet Russia, he generally tip-toed around some of the more unforgiveable realities. Regarding the often violent political purges Nehru writes that “the Soviet Government has a special and a ruthless way of treating its political opponents and all those whom it may suspect of counter-revolutionary activities. The humane principles of the general criminal law

168 Nehru, “The fascination of Russia,” in Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, 381.
are not supposed to apply to them as they are considered to be the enemies of society.”170 The word ‘special’ most likely referred to executions or exiles to Siberia of class enemies by the Soviet government. Nehru’s comments on the Soviet Union are insightful for they show at the same time a curiosity for communist Russia as a distrust of a past of British skewed history. For many the Soviet Union still represented an alternative to the British, whom they had bad experiences with in the past and with the Soviet Union they were mistrustful of its portrayed dark side.

Subhas Chandra Bose is perhaps the most oriented with violence of the Indian nationalists. He was also relatively young. Born in 1897, Bose would have been barely twenty by the time of the Russian Revolution. Again the educated background is evident as his father was a respected lawyer in Eastern India. Bose too went to college, both in India to Calcutta’s Presidency College and later at Cambridge to qualify for a position in the Indian Civil Service. He soon became bored of that however and with the rise of Gandhi following World War I became much more interested in politics.171 But whereas Gandhi could be seen as placing in the conservative side of Indian nationalism, Bose took to the left-wing socialist side.

Like Nehru, Bose’s socialism though was not directly Bolshevik as he explained “socialism today has different complexions and therefore different connotations when used by different people…to some people, again socialism is synonymous with communism.”172 He rose to prominence later than Gandhi, or Nehru and made his first mark in 1928 when he co-founded the radical Independence for India League with Nehru. Nehru at the time was a self-avowed

171 Getz, Subhas Chandra Bose: A Biography, 7.
socialist; though spoke in milder terms often than Bose. Also like the other nationalists Bose served jail sentences on different occasions, eleven times is all.\textsuperscript{173}

Mohammad Ali Jinnah was a leading Muslim leader in British India during the nationalist movement. He went from being a leading advocate of unity to one of the founders of the separate state of Pakistan. It was quite the political transformation. Jinnah had been an active leader in the Indian National Congress since 1906. Like many of his colleagues he was an esteemed lawyer, educated in Great Britain, and a stout secularist. In 1916 he served as a legal counsel for B.G. Tilak during his sedition trial. Jinnah was instrumental to reviving the Muslim League in 1924 and become most prominent in independence from Britain into the 1930s.\textsuperscript{174} Perhaps this is why above all his reversal to supporting separate states based on religion of the population surprised many. It seems the nature of socialism uniting people along class boundaries rather than religious or ethnic did not have the same appeal to Jinnah as it did with some of the other nationalists. Jinnah then displays the breadth of political spectrum that incorporated the nationalist movement. It certainly was not a movement solely populated by individuals with socialistic leanings.

By 1928 there still was not a singular Communist Party of India. Instead the Communist International directed some of its words to the All-India Trade Union Congress, one of the scattered groups of leftist organization in India at the time. The letter stated that “your conference is taking place at a moment which may become the turning point in the history of national revolution.”\textsuperscript{175} Here we can see in the Communist International is acknowledging how purely Marxist rhetoric was not inciting the rebellions they were hoping. Instead they rebranded

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\textsuperscript{173} Patil, \textit{Subhas Chandra Bose: His Contribution to Indian Nationalism}, 198.
\textsuperscript{174} For more on Jinnah, see Metz, \textit{The Political Career of Mohammad Ali Jinnah}.
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their efforts as supporting of a nationalist struggle. Whereas Marxism sees the world as a system of class conflicts and nationalism as a way to keep the working classes from uniting, here they are admitting its reality and are appealing to nationalist tendencies.

At the sixth Communist International Congress in 1928 the Soviet consensus was that it was finally high time to form a single communist party in India as its efforts to work through existing nationalist and trade organizations was working to no avail. The lofty goals were to “continue in the struggle against British imperialism for the emancipation of the country, the destruction of all of all survivals of feudalism, the agrarian revolution, and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry in the form of a Soviet republic.” The process of building a successful communist party in India had been a difficult one, in that throughout the 1920s “the Indian National Congress, lead by Mahatma Gandhi, completely dominated the Indian political scene.” M.N. Roy seemed to have overstated the communists’ organization in India too when advocating for action and resources from the Soviet Union. The R.P. Dutt led CPGB became aware of this when it sent a member to report on their Indian comrades only to find “no evidence whatever of party organization.” The willingness to use violence as a tool to gain independence and ultimately to usher in communist revolution repelled many supporters of Gandhi, so it did not help that the party was suspected to receive arms and funding from sources foreign to India within the USSR.

The picture fellow communists had of the situation in India however differed greatly with that of the British. Other reports out of India seem to confirm British fears of communist

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178 Callaghan, Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism, 90.
179 Farrington, ed., Indian Political Intelligence Files: 1912-1950, vol. 4, Communism: Russia, 1922-1938.
influence as Viceroy Lord Irwin expressed alarm at the growing communist influence and the
Government of India claimed “there was hardly a single public utility or industry which had not
been affected by in whole or in part by the wave of communism which had swept the
country.”\textsuperscript{180} The organizations that would receive this funding existed in a number of Indian
cities. This would indicate that any socialist rumblings were not a singular isolated anomaly, but
indicative of a more widespread movement. The geographic spread of this information would
have been concerning for a government trying to keep the lid on nationalist fervor. Unions of
various strategically important industries were watched such as railway workers. A communist
youth league was spied upon. Political parties with any kind of left leaning orientation made
appearances in the intelligence files such as the Workers and Peasants Party and an interesting
one known as the Ghadar Party. This was a Sikh organization founded by the immigrant
community on the Pacific coast of the United States.\textsuperscript{181}

Among the concerns of the British were ideological, nationalist support, direct funding,
and oil. Oil was a resource of relative new importance to the British Empire. They suddenly had
a renewed interest in the Middle East. It was of strategic importance to maintain the security of
their oil resources, processing, and distribution capabilities at home and abroad. Within the IPI
files is a thread of documents pertaining to Soviet oil interests within the British realm. Among
the many documents, one here illustrates the innate distrust the British had for anything Soviet.
In an explanation to an inquiry if a Soviet oil company could have interests beyond sales, the
document states “their activities, like all those of the Soviet so-called ‘commercial’ organizations,
are never purely trading, and, as in the case of Arcos, they certainly cover a good deal of political

\textsuperscript{180} Callaghan, \textit{Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism}, 103.
\textsuperscript{181} For more on the Ghadar Party, see Juan L. Gonzalez, Jr., “Asian Immigration Patterns: The Origins of the Sikh
activity.”182 See Appendix F. Included in the files is a hand drawn map of Great Britain and all of
the locations the Russian Naptha Syndicate operated.183 See Appendix G. Also included is a hand
drawn map of the Caspian and Black Sea region and north into the Soviet Union detailing the oil
pipelines and other oil infrastructure. In all there are over 50 separate documents regarding
Soviet oil as pertaining to interests the Indian Political Intelligence found important.

Among the IPI collections are an assortment of other topics that link the activities in
India to the Soviet Union. There are threads on propaganda, connections with foreign communist
intrigue in places such as China, Persia, Turkey, even the United States. Connections with
Islamist movements such as the Kalifat, which has an entire microfiche collection assigned to it
are explored as well. Names such as Nehru and Gandhi appear relatively infrequently, but other
notable names also appear such as the Indian Nobel winning poet Rabindranath Tagore regarding
his travels and correspondences.

The classic revolutionary support in the form of firearms and funding is also seen in the
IPI files. One such report involves investigation and diplomatic posturing with the Soviet
ambassador regarding 12,000 “old” Russian rifles suspected of being bought in Eastern Europe
with the intention shipping them east to China and India.184 See Appendix H. Referring to
mounting evidence of Soviet meddling in India, Sir Austen Chamberlain said in a debate in the
House of Commons that

The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary of that date made it unmistakably clear
that we are not going to tolerate any form of propaganda that interfered in the

internal affairs either of this country or of any of the Dominions of this country or of any part of the British Empire. See Appendix I

The propaganda Chamberlain was referring to is the types of documents and evidence that British officials would have been briefed on thanks to the existence of the Indian Political Intelligence. Material assistance tracked such as rifles was very low, however, in comparison to the number of documents tracking propaganda or the activities of the Communist International and various leftist organizations.

As the 1920s gave way to the 1930s the activities of the Communist International decreased significantly. Where it held five congresses in the subsequent years following its founding in 1919, it would hold only one in the fifteen years following the Seventh Congress in 1928. With the ascension of Joseph Stalin in the latter years of the 1920s, his “socialism in one country” policy turned the focus of the Soviet Union inward rather than Lenin’s idealist spreading of the communist revolution. Various international communist parties altered their strategies as the original purpose of the Communist International dissipated since it had “lost any stable criterion by which to judge the ‘correctness’ of any particular policy.” The body became mainly a symbolic venture as it no longer received the resources it had in the past when its goals were deemed of importance.

The behavior of the Indian communists towards the independence movement in the years leading up to and during World War II alienated many Indians. The Soviet Union did not want to risk straining relations with their warming relations with the British as Hitler rose in Europe, and so instructed the communists in India to tone down resistance to British rule. It was on this point that Roy just could not waver and helped push himself out of the communist movement in India.

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By this time however the party was receiving very little in terms of direct Soviet support and Roy had grown disillusioned with international communism. Roy’s thoughts seem to be a bell weather here of the party’s success as this caused the Communist Party of India to lose much of any kind of support it ever had from the public. This called into question whether the Indian communists wanted Indian independence more or Soviet-led communist domination.

This seems to be only half the picture though, as others have argued that the reason for communist failure is not as much failure by Indian communists but failure of the Communist International for not maintaining a coherent message and set of goals for international communism. One of Roy’s major detractors in building the Indian Communist Party was that he lived away from India more than twenty years in places such as Berkeley, California where he mingled with the intellectual community. This was followed by travels to Mexico and Germany and so was not very well acquainted with the political realities in India upon his return in the 1930s, namely the strength of Gandhism. He was accused by the Communist International of not accurately representing the realities of the revolutionary potential in India, and resulting from disagreements with the Communist International was eventually expelled from it in 1929. In the 1930s Roy would be arrested and imprisoned for six years in India, join the Indian National Congress, split with it following entry into World War II, and in the final years of his life Roy even moved on from Marxism as a political philosophy. Quite a life, and an ideal person to investigate in order to better understand the influence the Soviet Union hoped to incur in British India.

All things considered, Nehru seems to have been more directly influenced early on in his career as well. By the late 1930s Stalin shifted Soviet policy and Nehru became less than


inspired with Soviet Communism. Perhaps he also became more centrist as he lead the Indian National Congress and adhered more by the ideals of socialism which could be non-violent and more egalitarian than what was occurring in the Soviet Union. In 1938 Nehru wrote he was a socialist “in the sense that I believe in socialist theory and method of approach. I am not a Communist chiefly because I resist the tendency to treat Communism as holy doctrine, and I do not like being told what to think and what to do…I feel also there is too much violence associated with the Communist method and this produces untoward results as in Russia in recent years. The ends cannot be separated from the means.”189 The Gandhi influence here shines through.

Bose follows the trend of that of Nehru and Roy by putting national independence as objective number one. His ordering of priorities is indicative of many nationalists, writing in 1938 that “our main task in this age is to end imperialism and win national independence for the Indian people. When freedom comes, the age of national reconstruction will commence and that will be the socialist phase of our movement.”190 This socialism was not to be “blindly” followed in the footsteps of the West. Not “any –ism,” be it communism, liberalism, capitalism but he wanted an Indian type that could draw on all these other nations to learn from their experiences.191 At one point he said that India needed a socialist regime, but that it should be a “synthesis between Communism and Fascism,” though he later admitted to using a poor choice of words.192 He said that “communism today has no sympathy with nationalism” and that Russia today is on her defensive and has little interest in provoking a world revolution.” He would also voice sentiments that the anti-religious and atheistic views do not mesh with India. This interest

189 Nehru, note recorded at Khali in Nehru Papers. Quoted in Nanda, ed., Socialism in India, 14.
190 Bose, “Presidential address at the All India Anti-Compromise Conference, Ramgarh (Bihar), Mar. 19, 1938,” quoted in Patil, Subhas Chandra Bose: His Contribution to Indian Nationalism, 192.
in Fascism would ultimately make his fame greater, but also lead to a position largely outside of the mainstream nationalist movement until his death leading a revolutionary army during World War II.

While Bose was a self avowed socialist, his poor relations with fellow Indian Communists such as M.N. Roy, and the Soviet Union’s seemingly disinterest in Indian independence turned him away from any direct communist ties. Instead he began to admire the leaders of fascist regimes which had so quickly taken power and lead their nations to prominence, Hitler, Mussolini, and the Tojo regime of Japan. He was a complicated individual who never could really be pinned down as a communist or fascist. If anything he was socialist in economics but fascist in leadership style. By this point however World War II had begun and attentions were being diverted to the war. Bose would go on to strengthen ties with the Axis powers by leading an army of Indians based out of Japanese conquered Southeast Asia and would establish the Provisional Government of Free India (based in Japanese controlled Singapore). He led the Indian National Army composed of Indian POWs and volunteers. It is an important event but is out of the context of this work as Bose and the Soviet Union did not have a relationship. As author V.S. Patil puts it, Bose was “neither a terrorist, nor a communist, nor a fascist. He was a militant freedom fighter, socialist, and humanitarian.”

The IPI was still functioning long into the 1930s. It still had reports on the revolutionary training school that was established by the Soviet government in Tashkent, Uzbekistan with the aims of training individuals to become communist revolutionaries in their homelands. The Tashkent school was eventually shelved too however and a revolutionary school was established in Moscow. One document states that “it is a fact that Indians have been trained in revolutionary

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propaganda at Tashkent.” The school in Moscow had been subject to British interest for a number of years after as well, as the 1936 document details “Indian Propaganda Schools in Moscow.” See Appendix J. Notice that schools is plural as other documents show a number of schools in Moscow in which Indians were believed to have been enrolled. See the list of twenty-four Indians British intelligence collected. The list has names and suspected whereabouts, with one name simply being listed as “Dead.” See Appendix K. By this stage though the volume of information regarding funding had largely dried up. As went the Communist International so did evidence of material revolutionary support. The Soviet influence in India ceased to be even Churchill’s main concern by 1934 with the rise of Nazi Germany and communist revolution in China. See Appendix L. It appears the impending doom of British India at the hands of the Bolsheviks had been averted.

The Indian Political Intelligence did not shut down operations into the 1930s; it simply shifted its resources to more promising leads. The full listings of documents included in the IPI files are insightful in their own right. Keep in mind for this work mainly IPI 4 was consulted with some from IPI 6 as well. The volume of intelligence documentation is much greater than analyzed in this piece. As this table of contents from the IPI guide shows, IPI 4 and 6, the two used for this piece is just a small portion of the intelligence files that exists. Among the more interesting sections are IPI 5, on the Communist Party of Great Britain. The fact that an agency devoted to Indian politics has an entire subsection devoted to a phenomenon half a world away displays the truly global nature of the communist threat. The fears of conspiracy were not just

197 Neilson, Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order: 1919-1939, 55.
isolated hunches or scapegoats, but a threat with an ideological background, with support in multiple places (India, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain), and had mountains of evidence in the form of funding, intercepted correspondence, publishes, and so on. Perhaps it is unfair to say the British over reacted to the Soviet threat in India considering this, but at the same time their predisposed hostility to communism bred conditions for intelligence to confirm suspicions. Some of the attempts to connect widespread Indian unrest to Soviet influence simply fall short.

IPI-7, the Meerut Conspiracy Case drives home this pinning of communism as the motivational force behind Indian unrest. The case involved Communist Party of Great Britain members arrested and charged with revolutionary activities in India. Through the course of the much publicized trial in India, connections with Indian trade and labor organizations were made clear. The Government of India used the evidence to crack down on socialist and revolutionary trends in India. The case ended in the imprisonment of these men, and put the movement in India on notice that the British government would not tolerate seditious behaviors.

IPI-11 is perhaps the other remaining collection of documents that would be most interesting to investigate further. On the League Against Imperialism, this is a congress that has been referenced in numerous intelligence sources. This seems to be the meeting point for anti-British forces from the communist perspective and from the self-determination perspective. The meeting has an entire microfiche collection on it, but references to it also appear in the IPI 4 and 6 collections. What the cornerstone for this study shows, the IPI 4 documents, is that they are not the end of the story. If 4 and 6 are any indication, IPI 5 and 11 enlarge the evidence the British

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199 The process of acquiring IPI 4 and 6 was quite time consuming. They were chosen first because they appeared to have the broadest focus and thus best evidence for my general thesis topic at the time I was researching in spring of 2010. Scanning and saving hundreds of documents was highly laborious and through interlibrary loan I only had access to two microfiche sets at a time on loan from the University of North Carolina. This specific example, while out of the scope of this piece, would be an excellent source to investigate further using the IPI documents.
collected corroborating Soviet-lead communism to Indian unrest and the potential loss of their most important colony.

IPI 8, 9, and 10 all report on various possible dangerous trends in Indian politics, but with the focus of these sections not explicitly socialist, and most likely not, they were not deemed as necessary, though a comparison with the non-leftist tendencies in Indian independence would be important to ground and context the discussion of Communism in Indian independence.

An alternative perspective to consider is if the Indian leaders accentuated any of these subversive activities to take advantage of a perception of British paranoia. This line of thinking could only be speculative but it is something to consider nonetheless. Historians generally have offered the sentiment that “the Communist party, in spite of governmental alarums, was too small,” presumably to successfully incite a Marxist revolution to overthrow British rule in India. Anything that was socialistic alarmed the British government in India and the big-business interests, at the top of this alarm was the founding of the Congress Socialist party in 1934.

This sort of leftist sentiment did not disappear from the nationalist movement into the 1930s, it just seems to have lost a major international ally’s real support.

The dates in which the Indian Political Intelligence files were the most active would indicate the years the British remained most concerned with Soviet subversion. The majority of documents come from the 1920s rather than the 1930s. This is a pattern that mirrors the activity of the Communist International’s activity. The stated goals of Stalin’s “socialism in one country” program help to explain this. They turned the focus of the Soviet Union from international communist revolution to solidifying the stability of the Soviet Union. Britain’s recognition of the

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emerging threat of Hitler’s Germany as a threat over Stalin’s Soviet Union too could have played a role in the psyche of intelligence gathering. Relations between the Soviet Union and Great Britain would thaw as the recognition of a common enemy formed.

For Indian nationalists, what Nehru would articulate as an innate curiosity the Soviet Union represented for the people of India, devolved into an unfortunate scene of violence for the international community. The political thought of Gandhi and Stalin took further root in each country and wedged the two further apart. What may have developed into a relationship between the two nations and greatly alarmed the British in the years following World War I, became apparent into the 30s that whatever potential existed early on was no longer practical in a Gandhi dominated India. Early in these interwar years however, Britain was unsure how strong the appeal of Soviet communism would be. The quickly increasing momentum of the Indian nationalist movement seemed to overwhelm the ability of the British government to explain it in terms that did not admit that it may have been simply what it appeared, a nation that wanted home-rule. Instead the British framed the unrest in the context of Bolshevik conspiracies originating in the Soviet Union and disseminated home to Britain and to the colonies. Whether officials on the ground believed this or not is unknown, but the rampant anti-Soviet rhetoric gave the British a convenient common enemy from which provided talking points and explanation, and turned away introspective reasoning for the turmoil in India.

The independence movement remained mainly nationalistic in the late 1930s as communists struggled to achieve relevance amidst accusations that they were working on behalf of foreign interests. But the interesting thing here is that even the most effective nationalists such as Gandhi and Nehru articulated the intrigue the Soviet Union represented for India. Roy is someone who embodied this connection the strongest, but was not simply an aberration in
history. The culmination of interest in Soviet communism and real connections between Indians and the Communist International was reason enough for the British to spy on these connections. Perhaps British efforts kept Soviet intrigue at a minimum, perhaps there never was a real Soviet threat to India, but regardless it was a concern that was very much a part of the British consciousness following World War I. If it were not for the shift in Soviet policy towards the end of the 1920s regarding International Communism, who is to say the types of support the Soviet Union would have offered Indian nationalists as their peak in Soviet curiosity seemed to occur just as the Communist International was losing relevance.
Conclusion

By the close of the 1930s the world was once again enveloped in world war. In one of history’s most glaring example of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” Great Britain and the Soviet Union had found themselves allied with one another against Hitler and fascist Nazi Germany. Both nations geared all aspects of society to the war machine to ensure their survival. Even with Allied victory in 1945, it was clear Britain could no longer afford its empire and within two years India was granted independence. Partitioned between majority populations Muslim Pakistan and Hindu India, the British left the subcontinent with one final mess, yet independence was achieved at last. The Soviet Union had sacrificed immensely during the war. Estimates are of 27 million dead, more than the combined dead of all other nations. But there it was standing as a leader in a new bi-polar world defined between capitalism and communism. The sovereign India, democratic as Britain has designed, elected Jawaharlal Nehru as its first Prime Minster. Though his past curiosity with the Soviet Union had been known, the Nehru of independent India wanted nothing to do with Soviet communism, just some of the egalitarian ideals of socialism in general. He positioned India as a non-aligned nation straddling between rival ideologies of the United States and the Soviet Union and proved that the Nehru of the late 1940s had no interest in falling under the hegemony of another foreign power but that India would stand on its own for the first time in centuries.

The Soviet Union under Stalin entering World War II had much different priorities than the Soviet Union emerging out of World War I under Lenin. Whereas in the initial years of the Soviet Union it was seen as the first stage of a global communist revolution, roughly twenty years had passed and instead it focused on maintaining its defenses in a world with hostile ideologies of capitalism and fascism. The Communist International barely convened, just once more in 1935, and Stalin disbanded it all together in the midst of the war in 1943. The role of the
Soviet Union in India began as a possible alternative to revolution in Europe in the first couple of years after World War I. While Soviet leaders spoke of supporting communist parties across the world, and invited leaders from around the world to Moscow, its contributions remained largely educational and ideological. Money and some arms made their way to India, but the evidence of large scale material assistance is scarce in consideration of the scale of size of India. By the time Joseph Stalin was in charge of the USSR, his brand of “socialism in one country” refocused resources to strengthening the Union rather than actively encouraging revolutions abroad. The Soviet Union dabbled in playing a role in Indian independence, but ultimately decided it was out of its realm of possibility considering the resources and possible international repercussions of involving itself on a larger scale.

Indian nationalists following World War I agitated for greater and greater degrees of autonomy as they believed India had proven its loyalty and worth during the war. The growing number of western educated Indians and growing class of civil servants argued for their rights to democracy and were armed with the additional tool of national self-determination. As Great Britain chose instead to restrict freedoms rather than increase them, the opposing ideology of the Soviet Union drew the curiosity of many. They saw in it a system that openly condemned imperialism, and claimed the ideals of equality, in whatever form including racial. While things like acceptance of armed violence and denunciation of religion made the Soviet brand of communism incompatible in an India politically dominated by Gandhi, it nonetheless drew interest from a number of nationalist leaders. M.N. Roy would be the one most associated with communism in India, but even he failed to form a single communist party in the country until late in the 1920s and by then support from the USSR was haphazard at best. Communism never
gained a strong footing in the colony of India, and never had the popular support that other nationalist-first oriented groups did.

Great Britain emerged from World War I still in firm grasp of its colonial possessions, and in no hurry to give them up. Unrest increased in India while anti-colonial rhetoric spewed from the new Soviet Union, a nation founded on an ideology that sought the overthrow of the capitalist world. From the British perspective in India, they had two groups interested in their loss of the colony; Indian nationalists who wanted independence and the Soviet Union who stood to benefit from any loss of power by the British Empire. This is in addition to the historic rivalry in Afghanistan, the traditional invasion route to India, between Russia and Britain in the nineteenth century known as The Great Game. For an intelligence community that simply did not have the resources to track and explain the mass movement that was Indian nationalism, in a nation of hundreds of millions, foreign influences became the more convenient target. In an atmosphere of severe anti-Soviet rhetoric, watching the efforts of leftist organizations and honing in on anything that could be traced to the Soviet Union was a natural outgrowth. It became a sort of positive feedback loop, if you will, as suspicions of Bolshevik conspiracy and a Red Scare in Britain caused intelligence officials, who had to filter and prioritize intelligence, to focus on anything that could be linked to the Soviet Union. This meant a disproportionate amount of evidence was documented concerning communism and Soviet links compared to accepting the reality of the mass appeal of Gandhi and Indian nationalism. This would have reinforced the preexisting biases within British leadership regarding Soviet influence in India and the cycle continued until an appreciable amount of time proved a communist revolution in India was not forthcoming.
The area of imperial intelligence is a fascinating field seemingly ripe with possibilities. The Indian Political Intelligence files, while mentioned in relative passing by some recent historians, seem to offer a wealth of material. The most recent research by Andrew Muldon makes some use of the files, but in even less depth than this piece. He uses their existence as evidence to back up his discussion on intelligence in the colonies. Further research into the IPI files as the focus would increase the ease at which historians of the intelligence community, colonial historians, and historians of international communism could locate and analyze documents pertaining to their areas of interest. What this work did was just touch the tip of the iceberg regarding these three diverse subject areas. Each could undoubtedly be expanded to provide further insight and corroboration between events and individuals mentioned in the files, and other independent sources in their various contexts. It could also prove fruitful to use the files in comparison with other colonial administrations, whether within the British Empire or with another nation such as France or Spain. The intelligence files give a glimpse into a world where communist intrigue was at its highest, and when a ruling force had potential threats to its power from a number of sources, both domestic and international.

What any discussion of intelligence leads to can cause governments and societies to question the effectiveness of the tools employed by authority over people. Information is all in the eye of the beholder. It is one thing to collect copious amounts of raw data, but a complete other thing to interpret and analyze it. That part of the process is completely subjective and open to the influences of any number of factors, from societal influences to the private opinions of an individual. At each level the added layers of bureaucracy introduce new variables to the equation, and greater degrees of uncertainty regarding its interpretation. The generation of information in Imperial British India from surveillance on the ground, to officials at police and
intelligence bureaus, to officials in Britain and its leaders, back to official policy and directives for the intelligence operations in India introduced at each stage considerations and biases potentially completely independent of the real events in India. Resource limitations meant intelligence gathering had to be prioritized, while prejudices influenced where those limited resources would be spent. A selection bias in the information leaders had available was a definite possibility which is difficult pinpoint in retrospect, and would have been close to impossible to discern while amidst the moment. This introduced the possibility for British officials to see more of what they feared without the fair context of the rest of Indian political turmoil in the increasing nationalist fervor of Gandhi’s India. These purely nationalist elements certainly were not ignored, but for leaders such as Winston Churchill, Gandhi just did not incite the same fear and angst for those at home in Britain as Lenin and Stalin did.

All this begs the question: how much are the decisions of our leaders based on fact, and how much is based on reinforcements of what they think they already know? If the Soviet Union was not so vocal about its initial ambitions for spreading communism, would British leadership have expressed such hostility towards it? Without an atmosphere of deep suspicion and contempt for the Soviet Union would political intelligence reports in India have honed in on socialist leaning or Soviet-tied documents with such ferocity? These are questions which cannot be definitively answered, but their example illustrates a point that is not unique to interwar British India. Rarely is the information at the disposal of our leaders pure, unbiased and raw data. Even the information that leads to decision making is the result of a long process subject to human interpretation and error. While this can never be truly avoided, it can be taken into account. At no point does it appear the British were aware that their intelligence was at least partially a product of their own conception.
Diagram of Organization of the Government of the Soviet Union
Mr. Peel.

It is a fact that Indians have been trained in revolutionary Communist propaganda at Tashkent. A special school for Indians was opened there somewhere about 1920 by M.N. Roy and Abani Nath Mukherji. Some of those trained there were Mahajirin, some of whom subsequently went on to courses in the Eastern University, Moscow. The Moscow training ultimately became the more popular of the two and the Tashkent School was closed several years ago. It is rather difficult at such short notice to give you the names of those definitely known to have been trained in Tashkent as distinct from Moscow, but some returned to India in 1931 and were convicted under Section 121 A in the Peshawar Conspiracy Case. I have no information as to whether there are any other Indians undergoing any other sort of training in Tashkent at the moment. I cannot say with certainty whether the Meerut Case contains any references to Tashkent, although I think that it is quite possible. In the circumstances I think the second of your suggested alternatives replies would be the more appropriate.

6-2-1930, Tashkent
Appendix C

Aug. 1922, Despatch of Communist Funds to India
Appendix D

26th October, 1923

SIR,

I am directed by the Secretary of State for India to say that he has been informed by the Government of India that the Soviet State Bank have asked the Chartered Bank of India, Australia & China whether they would be prepared to nominate the Soviet State Bank in Bombay. Acting under the instructions of the London head office of the Chartered Bank, the Bombay branch of that Bank conveyed to the Government of India that they there would be any objection to such an arrangement.

In doing so the Colonial Office stated that the London Office had informed him that the London agents of the Soviet State Bank, one of London banks of the highest standing, considered that their connection with the Soviet State Bank was quite satisfactory.

The Government of India referred the question to the Government of India, and the latter Government before deciding that reply to make have asked the Secretary of State whether it can be ascertained to what extent there is need for any excommunication that the establishment of such an agency might give an opportunity for the financing of Bolsheviks in India. Apart from this risk they consider that the establishment of banking facilities should ultimately be of opportune advantage to India. Without feel would be greatly obliged if the Secretary of State were so disposed, if he would be supplied with any information in the possession of the home office regarding

The Under Secretary of State,

[Signature]

10-26-1923, Bombay USSR Bank
Appendix E

Reference attached letter J and P [B] 8738 dated 26th October, from the Secretary of State for India, the Banks mentioned on page 8 of this communication have, with one exception, been kept under secret observation from time to time since the signing of the Trade Agreement with Soviet Russia, as the transactions of the Soviet Government in this country appeared to show that they were using their accounts in these banks for the purpose of financing revolutionary movements here and in the Colonies. Valuable information has been obtained by these means and in several instances the Soviet Government have been found, as indicated in the letter from the Secretary of State for India, using their London agents, without their knowledge, for the purpose of financing political propaganda.

The multiplicity of the agents of the State Bank of the U.S.S.R. in this country has increased the difficulties of research. The arrangement whereby the Bombay branch of the Chartered Bank of India became the representatives of the Soviet State Bank in Bombay could appear to provide an enviable opportunity of keeping a single channel of Communist finance under control and so maintaining observation over Soviet transactions as they affect that district. Should the question arise of appointing similar representatives in other centres, it would appear desirable that the local branches of the same Bank should undertake the business, provided, of course, that the Indian Authorities can come to satisfactory private arrangements with the Directors of Officials of the Chartered Bank similar to those which have been secured as far as the Banks referred to in this country are concerned.

[Handwritten note: Intd.] R.W.O. 7.11.23

11-9-1923, Bank surveillance
17th January, 1928.

Cecil Kisch, Esq.,
INDIA OFFICE,
Whitehall, S.W.1.

My dear Cecil,

Many thanks for your letter of the 12th inst., which I have only just received on my return from abroad.

The Russian Naptha Syndicate is, I believe, the concern which sells oil abroad on behalf of the Soviet Government. Their activities, like all those of the Soviet so-called "commercial" organisations, are never purely trading, and, as in the case of Arcos, they certainly cover a good deal of political activity.

We have not heard of their definite establishment in India, but I should think it highly probable that they have established there because they have recently sold large quantities of oil to the Standard Oil Company of New York, whose principles of commercial integrity have succumbed to the material temptations.
Map on Russian Oil
Appendix H

British Embassy,

June 4th, 1930.

Sir,

On receipt of your despatch No. 195 (N. 3368/3366/28) of May 28th, I requested the Military Attaché to His Majesty’s Embassy to make inquiries regarding the alleged shipment of Russian arms from Poland to India.

2. Colonel Martin was informed by the Polish General Staff that in June, 1928, 12,000 old Russian rifles were bought in Poland by a European agent and shipped at Gdynia with China as their ostensible destination. Again, in 1929, 3,000 such rifles were sold to an agent for shipment, it is understood, to the Far East. The whole of this consignment is, however, still in Poland. Except for these two transactions there has been no sale by the Polish Government of old Russian arms which could possibly have been destined for India, the Far East or the Near East.

3. The General Staff are not aware that any agents are endeavouring to buy old Russian rifles or rifles of Soviet manufacture in Poland, with a view to their shipment to India. As the sale of arms in this country is in the hands of a State concern, they claim that it is unlikely that such transactions could take place without their knowledge.

I have been,

(Signed) P.M. BROADHURST.

The Right Honourable
Arthur Henderson, M.P.,
etc., etc., etc.
Appendix I

Debate on the address July 8th, 1929.

SIR A. CHAMBERLAIN: I accept for myself the statement of the right honourable Gentleman, denying all connection between His Majesty's Government, not merely now but in the past, and the Third International. But the point of my observation was that, as the Prime Minister pointed out, the Third International is but an organ of the Soviet Government, with which you are proposing to negotiate.

MR. HENDERSON: I thank the right honourable Gentleman, but I had not finished. I have not touched closely the question of propaganda as raised by him. I should have thought that it is quite unnecessary for any further reference to be made in this Debate to that subject, having regard to the very definite statement made by the Prime Minister in reply to the right honourable Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition on the opening day. I do want to say this, that the only step that we have taken up to now is to get into communication with the Dominions. I want that to be clear to the House. We have only done that as the first step. As to the method that we shall adopt, that will depend to some extent upon the replies which the Dominions send to us.

The question of propaganda ought not to be a subject of Debate. In 1924, I think the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary of that date made it unmistakably clear that we were not going to tolerate any form of propaganda that interfered in the internal affairs either of this country or of any of the Dominions of this country.
Mr. Johnston

Attached are two copies of a memorandum regarding Indian Propaganda Schools in Moscow, which, as you will realise, I have had to draw up at very short notice. There is no objection to a copy of this being sent to the Foreign Office if you wish.

Perhaps you would let me know what reply you propose to make to the House of Commons question, as it might be desirable for me to add my comments.

7-2-1936, Schools in Moscow
Appendix K

List...Dead

100
Appendix K (continued)

(21) Abdul Bakir Anwar of Lahore

(22) Abdul Waris

(23) Ismail of Jullundur

(24) Shafiq Ahmad of Lahore

Dead.

Reported in Moscow in October 1922.

No information.

Lost reported in Afghanistan.

It is possible that 'Afsal' and 'Akram for whom search is being made in India are numbers 19 and 23 above. One of them may possibly be Copi Bailer Hai mentioned in the next paragraph.

We have heard nothing further of Copi Bailer Hai, the assistant from M.J. Roy who went from Glasgow and was in Calcutta in September 1922.

Amita Ghose, who had been working for Roy in France, went to India in December. Malini Gupta and G.K. Lohanil are reported to be on their way to India. Information has been received of the intended deputation to India by the Communist International of an Englishman named Charles at the end of 1923 and in January of an organizer to be nominated by the British Communist Party.

In September four Russian stowaways were detained at Colombo. One, named Rubin Hanker, escaped to Madras where he was arrested and sent back to Colombo. While in jail in Madras he was found talking with political prisoners and it was discovered

List...Dead

101
Appendix L - Guide to Indian Political Intelligence (IPI) Files

IPI-1. Organisation and personnel --
IPI-2. Islam and the Khilafat movement, 1912-1949 --
IPI-3. Inter-departmental Committee on Eastern Unrest, 1922-1927 --
IPI-4. Communism: Russia, 1922-1938 --
IPI-5. Communist Party of Great Britain, 1921-1948 --
IPI-6. Communism: India & Indian Communist Party, 1921-1950 --
IPI-7. Meerut conspiracy case, 1928-1933 --
IPI-8. Revolutionary and terrorist activities, 1914-1942 --
IPI-9. Control and censorship, 1918-1949 --
IPI-10. Indian National Congress, 1928-1947 --
IPI-11. League against Imperialism, 1925-1942 --
IPI-12. Other organisations and movements, 1921-1947 --
IPI-15. Other 'country' files, 1921-1949 --
IPI-17. Miscellaneous reports and subjects, 1924-1949
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