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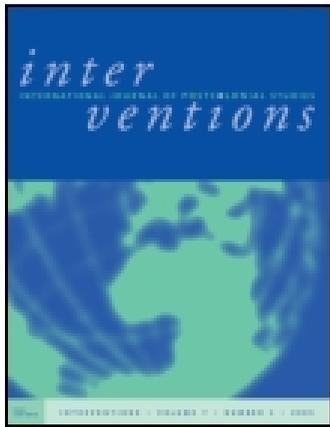
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Hub of the Anti-Imperialist Movement

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HUB OF THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST MOVEMENT

The League against Imperialism and Berlin, 1927–1933

Fredrik Petersson

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anti-imperialism

Chattopadhyaya, Virendranath

Comintern

European interwar history

international communism

League against Imperialism

Münzenberg, Willi

On 10 February 1927 the first International Congress against Imperialism and Colonialism, held in Brussels, Belgium, marked the official establishment of the League against Imperialism and for National Independence (LAI). The German communist Willi Münzenberg was the instigator of the congress, supported by the Comintern in Moscow. The congress was first mooted in 1925, however. From 1927 to 1933, Berlin was the operative centre for the LAI. Berlin was a haven for anticolonial activists in Europe during the 1920s, where the International Secretariat of the LAI coordinated anti-imperialist activism with the aim to fulfil the policy of the Comintern on the colonial question. The Nazi party's rise to power in Germany on 30 January 1933 witnessed the literal end of the German communist movement, the LAI and the anti-imperialist movement. This essay analyses the 'lost' history of the LAI, a sympathizing communist organization. The LAI was also a nostalgic reference for the decolonization movement in postwar societies that gained its momentum at the Afro-Asian conference in Bandung in 1955. The essay describes Berlin as the 'place' that provided anticolonial activists with a forum to manifest their political agenda. The

aim is to narrate the LAI as the hub for the anti-imperialist movement in Europe. For the involved actors, the communist and anticolonial movement, the LAI was the central means to develop an international anti-imperialist movement.

.....

Anti-imperialist organizations and associations recognized as national sections... shall bear the name of the League against Imperialism as their chief name... The League against Imperialism aims at uniting all individuals and organizations which, irrespective of their special objects, support the struggle against imperialism and for the political and social emancipation of all peoples. (Statutes of the League against Imperialism, 1927)

On 10 February 1927 the first International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism was inaugurated in the fifteenth-century Palais d’Egmont in Brussels. Under the slogan ‘National Freedom and Social Equality’, 174 delegates participated, representing 134 organizations from 34 countries. Of these, 104 delegates either had travelled from colonial and semi-colonial countries, or were active in Europe in national liberation movements. The congress ended on 14 February, after the unanimous decision had been taken to create a permanent anti-imperialist organization, the League against Imperialism and for National Independence (better known as the LAI), to ‘lead the struggle against capitalism, imperialist rule, in support of national self-determination and independence for every people’ (Gibarti 1927: 215–24). The words were uttered by Willi Münzenberg (1889–1940), a German communist and M.d.R. (member of the German Reichstag), organizer of the congress, and linchpin of the anti-imperialist movement in the 1920s in Europe.

Münzenberg had been closely connected with the leading Bolshevik elite, particularly Lenin, since the peak of the First World War. In 1921, as an outcome of the years of War Communism in Soviet Russia (1918–21), Münzenberg was instructed to organize a range of support committees in Europe and the United States to amass proletarian solidarity in the form of moral and material relief. The relief work was later carried out by the Workers’ International Relief (Internationale Arbeiterhilfe [IAH], 1921–35). The IAH was dissolved in 1935, after numerous organizational and political transformations. Not long after, in 1938, Münzenberg was expelled from both the Communist Party of Germany (hereafter: KPD) and the Communist International (also known as the Third International, or Comintern, 1919–43), and branded as *persona non grata* by his former allies. With the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, Münzenberg, who was living as a political émigré in Paris, was detained, along with other German communists, in Chambaran prison camp. When Germany invaded France in May 1940, every foreign detainee was released instantly and left to



their own devices. On 17 October 1940 Münzenberg's body was found by two hunters in the woods outside of the town of St Marcellin. The decomposed body was leaning against a tree with a steel noose around its neck. The mystery that remains unsolved and debated is whether Münzenberg committed suicide or was assassinated by the German Gestapo or the Soviet NKVD (Gross 1967; Wessel 1991: 218–47; McMeekin 2003: 304–7). No empirical evidence supports either of the two possibilities, murder or suicide. When the history of the Comintern was later written during the Cold War in the East and the West, the *persona non grata* status of Münzenberg contributed to erasing the extent of his influence and input in the construction of international communism in the interwar period.

The LAI was designed in response to Münzenberg's instincts and experience as organizer of sympathizing communist organizations, but it also responded to the ambitions of the Comintern to establish direct connections with the colonies, which up until 1927 had been minimal. In fact, Münzenberg had conceived the idea of the LAI, and in particular the Brussels congress, in Berlin on 16 August 1925 (RGASPI 538/2/18, 108–9, 18/6–1925).¹ For its part, the Comintern wanted to create a 'permanent organization to secure the support of the European proletariat for the liberation movements in the colonies' (RGASPI 495/3/2, 55–7, ECCI Secretariat, 5/1–1927), as well as an organization that would 'act as a neutral intermediary between the Communist International and nationalist movements in the colonies' (RGASPI 542/1/3, 10–11, 29/5–1926). Despite the political, organizational and administrative bond that linked the LAI with the Comintern, the pursuit of anti-imperialist objectives caused internal friction. By 1933 the LAI, if perceived as a part of the international communist network and controlled by the Comintern, ceased to exist after the Nazi Party (hereafter: NSDAP) seized power, first on 30 January with Hitler's nomination as State Chancellor, and ultimately, after the Reichstag fire in Berlin on 27 February 1933 (Striefler 1993: 381–5).² The period from 1927 to 1933 included a series of changes in tactics and objectives, as well as renewed attempts to construct a base for anti-imperialism in Europe and beyond.

The Brussels congress involved many distinguished and prominent delegates who represented a cross-section of political groups from all over the world. With the election of the Honorary Presidium and the Executive Committee, the LAI wanted its international approach to be a global voice in the anti-imperialist movement. The Honorary Presidium included French author Henri Barbusse, Albert Einstein, Mme Sun Yat-sen, and the Chinese General Lu Chung Lin; the Executive Committee consisted of British Labour Party leader George Lansbury, the trade unionist Edo Fimmen from the Netherlands, Jawaharlal Nehru as delegate of the India National Congress, the Kuomintang delegate Hansin Liau, the French-based Senegalese and

1 The Comintern archive is part of the Russian State Archive for Social and Political History (RGASPI) in Moscow, where the bulk of material on the LAI is located. References to the collections in the archive read as follows: RGASPI *fond/collection, opis/ part, delo/file, list/ page*. Documents from a second archive constitute an equally essential source: SAPMO BA-ZPA (Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde, Zentrales Parteiarchiv) in Berlin.

2 After temporarily locating the LAI and its International Secretariat in Paris in

September 1933, the entire apparatus of the LAI was transferred to London and placed under the jurisdiction of the British socialist and secretary of the British LAI Section, Reginald Bridgeman. This also indicated, in a sense, the withdrawal of direct communist influence on the LAI. In 1937 Bridgeman dissolved the LAI and formed the overtly socialist Colonial Information Bureau.

delegate of the Committee in Defence of the Negro Race Lamine Senghor, Münzenberg, the Puerto Rican Manuel Ugarte, and Mohammad Hatta from Indonesia and delegate of Perhimpunan Indonesia. Josiah T. Gumede and Jimmy La Guma represented South Africa and the African National Congress; Max Bloncourt from the Antilles was a delegate of the Inter-Colonial Association; Richard B. Moore acted as representative of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, the communist Manuel Gomez of the All-America Anti-Imperialist League, and Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union (Gibarti 1927: 233–42). William Pickens of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was invited, but for reasons unknown (according to the congress protocol) he was prevented from taking part in the congress. However, in Berlin in January 1927, Pickens delivered a speech at a public meeting (organized by the predecessor of the LAI, the League against Colonial Oppression [LACO]) on the topic ‘The Negro Problem in North America’ (SAPMO BA-ZPA R1001/6751, 24, 6/1–1927).

The Brussels congress and the LAI were the predecessors of the colonial movements that emerged after the end of the Second World War. Although a number of leaders in the anti-imperialist movement had fond memories of the Brussels congress and the LAI, relatively little is known about the true nature and functions of the LAI, its network, and its instrumental role as a hub for the anti-imperialist movement in Europe during the interwar period. Rather, the LAI was largely perceived as a nostalgic point of reference. The opening speech of Achmed Sukarno, president of Indonesia and host to the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung in 1955, addresses the nostalgia of the LAI:

Only a few decades ago it was frequently necessary to travel to other countries and even other continents before the spokespersons of our people could confer. I recall in this connection the Conference of the ‘League against Imperialism and Colonialism’ which was held in Brussels almost thirty years ago. At that Conference many distinguished Delegates who are present here today met each other and found new strength in their fight for independence. (McTurnan Kahin 1956: 40)

Mohammad Hatta, fellow nationalist to Sukarno and participant at the Brussels congress, resided in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, and was an active leader of the Indonesian nationalist group Perhimpunan Indonesia in Europe. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Hatta sent ‘a personal message to my old comrades’. Hatta fondly recalled his European sojourn and described the Brussels congress as an event where ‘complete unity of thought’ on the colonial freedom struggle was achieved (Hatta 1972: 504). Jawaharlal Nehru, a prominent leader of the liberation movement in India,

and later, India's first prime minister in 1947, also participated in the Brussels congress. He conceived the congress as a haven where a range of left-wing, pacifist and radical organizations, European trade unions, and individuals involved in the anti-imperialist movement had managed to meet in one place (Nehru 1953: 162).

Although the LAI is remembered with fondness, its legacy remains ambiguous, at least according to Vijay Prashad's conclusions in *The Darker Nations* (2007: 29).³ Unlike other historians, Prashad does not have misconceptions regarding the LAI. For example, Sean McMeekin argues that the organizations had ceased to function by 1929 (2003:208), while others categorize the LAI as a mere front (Carr 1982: 385).

As a consequence of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Anderson 2002), the Comintern Archive (RGASPI), where the major bulk of material on the LAI is deposited, opened in Moscow in 1992. There, new facts clarify some of the ambiguities associated with the LAI and its role and function in the anti-imperialist movement between the two world wars. Documents (correspondence, protocols of meetings in Berlin and Moscow, directives, resolutions) indicate that the LAI has to be perceived as something different in comparison to the rather wrongful categorization as a communist front organization set up by enthusiastic communists. However, the organization functioned as the main portal and hub for anti-imperialist activists who had lived in Europe, or whose origins can be traced directly from the colonial and semi-colonial countries. The 'hub' can be understood as a focal point of entry through which multiple individuals are connected on a single anti-imperialist network, an undertaking administered by the LAI and the Comintern. The theoretical framework of the hub is inspired by sociologist Mark Granovetter's (1983) discussion on the strength of weak ties contra strong ties, and his theory on low-density and densely knit networks. Additionally, sociologist Barry Wellman's (1997) conception of network analysis has contributed to the methodological analysis of the sources. The proposal is that the LAI aimed to function and present itself as the hub for the anti-imperialist movement in Europe, where Berlin provided the movement and the organization with a suitable *milieu* and the prerequisite to develop activity. More specifically, Berlin symbolized the place to give impetus to the agenda of the LAI. As articulated by historian Josephine Fowler, theorists on space and geography define 'places' as 'meeting place[s], the location of . . . intersections of particular bundles of activity spaces, of connections and interrelations, of influences and movements' (2007: 4–5). Berlin represented such a place for the anti-imperialist movement in the interwar period. From the outset in 1927 the LAI attempted to function as a political actor and spokesperson for the anti-imperialist movement, but over time, internal and external circumstances influenced the intentions of the LAI to act as a hub.

3 Prashad has not consulted the bulk of material on the LAI in the Comintern archives. His presentation of the LAI is based on the League against Imperialism Archives, 1926–1931, deposited at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.

This essay aims to illustrate how the LAI and its International Secretariat in Berlin aspired to contact, use and organize individuals in the anti-imperialist movement, with Berlin as the place that made it possible for such activity to take hold, flourish and then diminish. This is a ‘lost history’ of an organization that, first, defined itself by a limited network, but upon closer inspection, involved an array of actors crucial to the understanding of the anti-imperialist movement. The primary questions to pay attention to are as follows: what was the LAI, what did the organization represent, what was the aim, and on whose behalf did the organization subsist? While it may seem unproblematic to understand the history of the LAI as a failure, this only contributes to confirm its legacy as ambiguous. The historical perspective offers a different approach, or as Prashad notes the Bandung Conference was for the ‘leaders of nationalist movements . . . the culmination of a process that began at the 1927 Brussels gathering’ (2007: 32).

The Setting for the Anti-Imperialist Movement in the 1920s

The First World War ended in 1918 and reached its conclusion when the Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919. The subsequent establishment of the League of Nations was thought to be the means to end all wars. In reality, the global communities experienced this postwar state of affairs in a somewhat different manner. The German Weimar Republic was born in defeat, and the sociopolitical setting from which the LAI emerged was part and parcel of the aftermath of the Great War, above all, the bliss and decline of the ‘Wilsonian moment’ (Manela 2007). The 1920s must be understood in this context, and not simply as a pre-war decade and a prologue to the turmoil of the 1930s, which, in 1939, culminated in a new European conflict. On the contrary, the 1920s were a decade that witnessed the birth of new ideas and movements. The advent of these ideas and movements created vibrations that were felt in Europe and throughout the world. In Versailles the idea of national self-determination echoed throughout China, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia, Latin America and Africa, causing people to question the very fabric of colonialism and imperialism (Steiner 2005: 3–4, 602–3). As a consequence of Germany’s defeat by the Entente powers (United States, Great Britain, France and Italy), the country was stripped of its colonies, an action that the organizers of the LAI thought particularly favourable. The LAI International Secretary, the Hungarian communist Louis Gibarti (real name: Laszlo Dobos), stated in a report to the Eastern Secretariat at Comintern headquarters in Moscow that Germany’s loss of its colonies had provided the LAI with ‘independence’ to strengthen the anti-imperialist agenda in the country (RGASPI 542/1/16, 1–14, 29/3–1927).

In order to trace the origins of the LAI, one has to start where it all began – Berlin.

From Euphoria to Disarray, 1925–1930

Berlin was a sanctuary for anti-imperialist activists in the 1920s. The postwar milieu in the capital of the Weimar republic included a ‘sense of unreality’, an idea derived from liberalism and modernism, and which furthermore stood for the pursuit of all varieties of pleasurable entertainment. Some 5,000 political refugees, students and vagabonds from the colonies settled down in Berlin amid its neon-lit pavements, and in the city centre around the chaotic activity on Friedrichstrasse a sociopolitical microcosm was developed (Brendon 2002: 125; Barooah 2004: 247; Liang 1969: 158). These circumstances fostered the type of environment that made the activities of the LAI and the anti-imperialist movement a possibility in the 1920s.

The 1927 Brussels congress was the result of a process set in motion in the summer of 1925. In China the British army mandate forces brutally suppressed a strike instigated by workers in the Shanghai textile industry (Degras 1960: 218). This action created a shock that was felt in Europe, and was used by the IAH to start the Hands Off China campaign in the Weimar Republic. On 1 December 1924 the Comintern had instructed the IAH to organize a China campaign, but the secretariat of the executive committee of the Comintern (ECCI Secretariat) was informed by the headquarters of the IAH in Moscow that nothing was planned simply because nothing had happened in China (RGASPI 538/2/27, 39–39b, 22/4–1925). Given the circumstances, the Shanghai insurgence could not have come at a better moment. From June to July, the Hands Off China campaign received widespread recognition. Large crowds attended public rallies in Germany, and to celebrate the apogee of the campaign the IAH organized a congress at the Herrenhaus in Berlin on 16 August. On 18 August, Münzenberg wrote to the chairman of the Comintern, Grigori Zinoviev, that roughly a thousand people had attended the congress, at which a couple of Chinese scholars (unknown) had suggested to Münzenberg that it might be worthwhile to organize a ‘real, all-encompassing congress against imperialist colonial politics either in Brussels or Copenhagen’ (RGASPI 538/2/27, 108–9, 18/8–1925).

Rather than focusing solely on China, Münzenberg realized the necessity of developing the anticolonial rhetoric and philanthropic approach of the IAH. In light of the 1925 Syrian uprising and its violent outcome (Fieldhouse 2006: 286–8), Münzenberg was given the incentive to broaden the anti-colonial agenda. In his negotiations with the Ukrainian communist and

secretary in the Comintern apparatus, Dmitri Manuilsky, Münzenberg received approval to establish the Against the Cruelties in Syria Committee in December 1925 (SAPMO BA-ZPA I 6/3/148, 68, 8/12–1925). Again, it proved uncomplicated to amass successful demonstrations of proletarian solidarity and sympathy across Europe among left-wing circles, anticolonial activists and leading intellectuals in Germany such as Ernst Toller, John Heartfield and Erwin Piscator (SAPMO BA-ZPA RY22/V S.U.F./95, 18a–18b, December 1925). The Against the Cruelties in Syria Committee confirmed Münzenberg’s belief that the colonial question held great potential both to widen the activities of the IAH and function as a portal for the Comintern in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. To verify the need to organize a ‘great anticolonial demonstration’, Münzenberg used all available contacts in Moscow and Berlin in January 1926 to summon 43 individuals to a conference at the Rathauskeller in Berlin on 10 February 1926. The primary goal of the conference was twofold. On the one hand, it needed to establish the League against Colonial Oppression (LACO) which, in turn, confirmed the plan to locate the European anti-imperialist movement in Berlin. On the other hand, the conference delegates gave their mandate to the IAH to organize the first international anticolonial congress in Brussels (RGASPI 542/1/4, 2–4, 10/2–1926). According to Münzenberg, the Rathauskeller delegates represented the top echelon of anticolonial activists living in Berlin, which included Jahia Haschni of the Arab Student Association and the Islamic Academic Association, the Persian student and communist Achmed Assadoff, and Virendranath Chattophadyaya (also known as Chatto) (RGASPI 542/1/4, 5–6, 10/2–1926). Chatto was an experienced national revolutionary from India and had spent most of his life in Europe as an anticolonial activist to build up an independent network with foremost Indian national revolutionaries. Despite his antagonistic relationship with leading Indian revolutionary Manabendra N. Roy, Chatto became the key figure in the construction of the LAI and its role as the anti-imperialist hub.

Louis Gibarti supervised the preparations for the Brussels congress in Berlin in 1926 by establishing contacts with leading personalities in the ‘imperialist countries’ and in the colonies. For example, Gibarti sent invitations to Gandhi (who responded that he ‘was afraid’ of the real purpose of the LACO); to the leader of the communist All-American Anti-Imperialist League in Chicago, Manuel Gomez; and to the general secretary of the All-India Trade Union Council, Joshi. The American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC) sent LACO a list of addresses of a hundred Negro organizations in Africa and the West Indies (RGASPI 542/1/18). Nevertheless, the extent of LACO was somewhat limited to Berlin and London. In December 1926 a British LACO Section was founded in London, with Reginald Bridgeman – a former diplomat in Teheran who had turned

towards socialism and pacifism in the early 1920s – acting as the coordinating force (Saville 1984).

Political difficulties emerged with the ECCI Secretariat prior to the Brussels congress, and there was an organizational dilemma in obtaining the necessary approval from the Belgian government to arrange the anti-colonial congress in Brussels. Despite these organizational and political difficulties, particularly the tension between Münzenberg and the Comintern, the congress went ahead as scheduled and became, as it was portrayed by the LAI, ‘the beacon at Palais d’Egmont’ (Gibarti 1927).

Brussels was an unanticipated success for Münzenberg. The ECCI Secretariat could read from Münzenberg’s first report that the congress was in ‘such a way visited’ that it exceeded the calculations made beforehand on the anticipated participation of 100–120 delegates (174 accredited delegates attended) (RGASPI 542/1/7, 120–3, 21/2–1927). Transforming the euphoria induced by the congress into a functional organization proved to be a tiresome task on behalf of the International Secretariat in Berlin. Münzenberg and Gibarti quickly realized that it was crucial to find key actors in the Weimar capital. In April 1927 Münzenberg approached the Chinese Hansin Liau, who lived in Berlin and had participated enthusiastically in Brussels, and requested that Liau be put in charge of leading the Chinese National Agency. The aim of the agency was to establish and funnel propaganda against the Kuomintang and its leader, Chiang Kai-shek, particularly regarding the Kuomintang’s violent suppression of its former ally, the Chinese communists, in China on 12 April (Fung 1985: 39). Additionally, the agency aimed to establish connections with Chinese anti-imperialists living in European cities such as Berlin, London and Paris (SAPMO BA-ZPA R1507/67115/123, 213, 23/5–1927). The agency was at first secretly connected to the LAI, but by August 1927 both Liau and the agency had merged with the LAI’s International Secretariat.

From 1927 to 1928 the LAI struggled to find a solid organizational basis while posing out in the open as a valid and functional political actor, particularly as an alternative to the colonial policies of the socialist Second International. Crippled by lack of finances, irregular contacts in the form of administrative and political directives from Comintern headquarters in Moscow, and the voluntary resignations of Gibarti and Liau, the International Secretariat barely managed to exist. The original aim – to act as the spearhead for the struggle against imperialism – was becoming a far-fetched illusion. With Gibarti and Liau out of the picture, Chatto began to gather a few stable contacts with important individuals like Hatta, who lived in Locarno, and Bridgeman in London (RGASPI 542/1/27, 29–30, 29/6–1928). Chatto realized that if the LAI could not function and act as an international organization, other methods and visions had to be explored. The contacts with France were minimal, and after Lamine Senghor’s death

on 25 November 1927, the anti-imperialist network in France almost disappeared. In the beginning of 1929, Robin Page Arnot, a British communist and Comintern functionary, conducted an analysis of the colonial work among the European communist parties, only to conclude that with Senghor's demise, the courier system in French ports had withered away (RGASPI 495/154/364, 52–4, February 1929).

The Sixth International Comintern Congress in Moscow (17 July–1 September 1928) marked a new phase for the colonial question, which spilled over onto the LAI. Otto W. Kuusinen, Comintern secretary and émigré communist from Finland, delivered the theses on the colonial and semi-colonial question at the congress. The theses had been adjusted after a radical policy shift towards a period categorized as the 'third period' in the international communist movement. The theses suggested replacing the strategy of a 'united front' with the more radical 'class against class' policy. In theory, this meant that former alliances with socialists, social democrats, national reformists, pacifists or radicals were shunned, and instead, a more revolutionary approach was put forward with the intention of drawing strength from witnessing the suspected and sudden downfall of capitalism (Degras 1960; Worley 2004). Thus, the fundamental political lifeline and communicative link of the LAI was internally placed in an unfavourable light. In the midst of all this the LAI planned to arrange its second congress in the summer of 1929.

The second international LAI congress convened in Frankfurt am Main, Germany on 21 July and ended on 27 July 1929. While Brussels bore witness to a euphoric demonstration, the Frankfurt congress was a stage upon which communists delivered aggressive verbal attacks. For example, the Profintern delegation (Red International Labour Union, RILU) and its representatives, the Afro-American communist James W. Ford and Ukrainian Grigorij Melnitschansky, aimed callous criticism against non-communist delegates who advocated a reformist advance as a means for effecting change in the system of colonialism and imperialism (Inprecorr 1929). For the LAI, the congress signalled the end of a short-lived era while Münzenberg stood in the wings and registered the chaos (RGASPI 542/1/30, 140, 3/8–1929; Gross 1967: 210). However, there was a twist to the whole affair. Prior to the congress, the chaos had been carefully planned at Comintern headquarters in Moscow solely for the reason to steer the LAI into a more radical direction that suited the ambitions of the agenda-makers in Moscow. While this was taking place, the colonial work in Europe's communist parties had fallen into disarray in 1929, and the LAI remained one of the few organizations that had an up-and-running anti-imperialist network.

To reduce the unwelcome consequences of the Frankfurt congress, the Comintern quickly moved to inaugurate a systematic analysis and reconstruction of the LAI and closely supervise the organization. The latter task

was given to the Comintern's monitoring and communicative agency in Western Europe, the West European Bureau (WEB). The investigative analysis was conducted by Czechoslovakian Comintern functionary and international communist, Bohumil Smeral. Without consulting the International Secretariat in Berlin or seeking its consent, Smeral began working as a secretary at the office in Berlin, and in the role as a delegate of the Comintern; he secretly observed and took note of the day-to-day activities of Chatto and Münzenberg (Petersson 2007: 109). To come to grips with the effects of the Frankfurt congress, Smeral reviewed the 'prominente Persönlichkeiten' in the LAI Executive Committee – the non-communist representation above all – and concluded in a report to Comintern secretary Osip Piatnitsky ('Michail') on 2 January 1930 that Nehru, Hatta, the Mexican artist Diego Rivera, Augusto Sandino from Nicaragua, James Maxton, and Edo Fimmen had left voluntarily or were expelled from the LAI (RGASPI 542/1/39, 5–11, 2/1–1930).

The original intention, to form a vigorous international anti-imperialist organization, and to unite activists and groups in the struggle against 'colonialism and imperialism', was on the threshold of complete failure at the beginning of 1930. In Frankfurt the disaster manifested itself in equivocal displays of antagonism delivered by the Profintern delegation. The chaos and internal unrest at the International Secretariat in Berlin would pave the way to what Chatto had already begun to envision in 1928, which was to have the LAI function as a hub for the anti-imperialist movement.

Anni Confusionis

In 1930 the global community was resisting the downward economic implications of the Wall Street Crash in October 1929. This incident had proven to the agenda-makers at Comintern headquarters in Moscow that the communist analysis of capitalist society was correct (Worley 2004). The International Secretariat found itself in limbo. From January to August 1930, Smeral collected intelligence from the leaders of a range of communist parties and organizations in Great Britain (Harry Pollitt), the United States (Earl Browder), Indonesia (Raden Darsono), Latin America (Charles Gamba), the Arabic region (Mustafa Saadi), Hungary, Greece and Czechoslovakia (RGASPI 542/1/42, 1–48, 1930). While confusion and disarray increased within the LAI in Berlin, the Comintern sought to maintain control of the preparations for the First International Conference of Negro Workers, scheduled for July 1930. The venture was in the hands of the Profintern, which aimed to establish the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW). The original plan was for the conference to convene in London, the heart of the 'imperialist system', but due to problems with the

British authorities it was relocated to Hamburg. George Padmore, the Trinidadian communist and Profintern functionary, and Ford were the two key actors who supervised the organizational preparations for the Hamburg conference. In some respects, Padmore and Ford depended to a great extent on links with the anti-imperialist movement in Berlin, above all with the LAI, the KPD and the League in Defence of the Negro Race (LDNR) and its secretary, the Cameroonian Joseph Ekwe Bilé (RGASPI 534/3/546, 55–8, 12/5–1930; Aitken 2008; Weiss 2006; Rüger 1967). The Berlin section of the LDNR was formed in September 1929 under the leadership of Tiémoko Garan Kouyaté, who shared his office with the LAI International Secretariat at 24 Friedrichstrasse (RGASPI 495/155/87, 404–8, 30/11–1930). The work of the ITUCNW in Germany, also known as the Hamburg Committee, was partly dependent on the network of the International Secretariat to preserve its momentum after the July conference, particularly in providing the ‘greatest possible assistance to the Negro [liberation] movement’ (RGASPI 534/3/668, 33–5, 18/5–1931).

While this was taking place, the Profintern arranged in Moscow its Fifth International Congress (15–30 August 1930). Smeral attended the congress with the sole purpose of summarizing his analysis of the LAI and presenting his conclusion to the Political Commission of the Comintern on 13 September. Smeral concluded that the LAI experienced difficulties in breaking away from the mould of the united front. The Frankfurt congress illustrated that the efforts to implement the new strategy and policy of the Comintern, the ‘class against class’, had instead severed all ties with prominent leaders in the colonial world (Nehru, Rivera) and in Europe (Hatta, Fimmen, Maxton). Smeral stated that the transition from acting as a large international sympathizing organization to becoming a small group was to be understood as an obstruction. The LAI was to fulfil an important task, and according to Smeral, the organization had to be seen as the link and actor that connected colonial revolutionary movements. The stratagem would therefore draw attention away from any suspicion that the Comintern was seeking to establish direct connections in the colonies. The reorganization of the LAI on this premise was to be accomplished by transforming and splitting the organization into two separate entities, suggested Smeral. The LAI was to pose as a ‘relief organization’ and declare itself as an independent non-party organization, which would retain Berlin as the centre and lend credence to the idea of having the LAI act as a genuine sympathizing communist organization, but in reality, functioning as a cover for the Comintern (RGASPI 495/4/52, 12–42, 13/9–1930). The LAI was to regard covert work as its main field of activity. This meant that the LAI needed to establish reliable connections in Europe, which could then be transferred to the colonial and semi-colonial world.

The International Secretariat in Berlin adjusted itself to accommodate the guidelines set by Smeral's analysis (the Political Commission adopted the decision on 16 September). In October the International Secretariat reported to the ECCI Secretariat that the LAI intended to become a 'consequent, uncompromising, revolutionary, non-party anti-imperialist organization' whose immediate goal was to establish sustainable contacts in Berlin, then in Europe (RGASPI 542/1/44, 95–6, October 1930). However, evidence suggests that the International Secretariat had been pursuing this particular direction as early as August of that year. William Patterson, a US communist who had received his political education at the *Kommunistischeskii universitet trudiashchikhsia Vostoka* (KUTV), one of the ideological institutes tied to the activities of the Comintern in Moscow, used the LAI as the main connection to establish contacts with Negroes in Berlin. His sole reason was to find suitable candidates to send to Moscow, to undergo political schooling either at the KUTV or the International Lenin School (ILS) (RGASPI 495/155/90, 73, 26/8–1930). On 14–15 October the principal staff at the International Secretariat (which named itself the 'kom.Fraktion', 'the communist fraction') – Münzenberg, Chatto, Smeral, and a Comintern functionary of Turkish origin, Bekar Ferdi (real name: Mechnet Schefik, and tied to the WEB) – held secret meetings with E. F. Small, a Gambian revolutionary and representative of the Gambian Labour Unions, and Frank Macaulay of the Nigerian Workers' Party. Through Kouyaté in Paris and the LDNR section in Berlin, the International Secretariat had been put in contact with Small and Macaulay, but as described by the LAI, their 'Negro friends', were 'under the illusion that we can give them substantial material aid' (RGASPI 495/155/90, 78–81, 3/11–1930). This rather far-fetched but common perception of the LAI and the KPD as financial supporters for the activities of the LDNR in Berlin, or the ITUCNW in Hamburg, was conceived with Padmore arguing that the International Secretariat was 'well acquainted with the terms of [the financial] agreement' (RGASPI 542/1/54, 92, 14/9–1932). Yet the LAI perceived itself to be more than just a financial outpost for anticolonial activists.

Techniques and Interference

Chatto was the key individual in an effort that began in 1928. Chatto envisioned, constructed and refined the strategy that established the LAI as a hub in Berlin. There were several clandestine networks and a variety of methods used to sustain the idea. The LAI organized public meetings in Berlin to confront and discuss the effects of the internal chaos during the *anni confusionis* of 1930. Overall, the organization held about fifteen public

meetings in Berlin from January 1930 to December 1931. The LAI involved anticolonial activists from Cuba (Sandalino Junco), the Chinese Student Association was deployed in order to commemorate the memory of Kuomintang founder Sun Yat-sen, and Bilé and the LDNR Berlin Section provided a number of contacts with people of African origin. Geographical focus placed an emphasis on the situation in China, India, Africa, Indonesia, Latin America and the Arab region. Loyalty to the Soviet Union was declared by supporting the inauguration of the first Five Year Plan. Additionally, energy was devoted to supporting the defendants in the Scottsboro case in the United States and the Meerut trial in India. Curricular sessions and seminars on specific colonial topics (Mexico, India) were arranged by the LAI in Berlin (SAPMO BA-ZPA R1501/20200).

Ferdi conducted fieldtrips to Paris, Amsterdam and Vienna between December 1930 and January 1931 to assess the current status of the LAI sections (RGASPI 542/1/48), while Chatto administered the European and transcontinental actors at the International Secretariat. In 1930 Chatto established regular contacts with a Balkan interest group and communist sympathizing association in Berlin, the Balkanföderation, which was governed by the leader of the WEB, the Bulgarian communist Georgi Dimitrov, but had the Bulgarian communist Dimitri Vlachoff and the Albanian nationalist Fan Noli administer the day-to-day activities (SAPMO BA-ZPA R/1501/20697). Other organizations that confirmed their ties to the International Secretariat via Chatto were disclosed by Kouyaté in a letter to an unknown addressee, dated 27 October 1930, which indicated that Chatto was believed to be the main link in corresponding activities and financial connections between the LAI and LDNR in Berlin (RGASPI 542/1/44, 75, 27/10–1930). Due to the fact that Chatto had no money to give to LDNR personnel in Berlin, this was an agreement that would, from time to time, lead to conflict (RGASPI 495/155/87, 404–8, 30/2–1030).

In Mexico City, Manuel Diaz Ramirez, a member of the Communist Party of Mexico and the Krestintern (also known as the Peasants' International, an auxiliary organization of the Comintern), sent information to Chatto on 31 January 1931, disclosing that he was in close contact with Chatto's old friend the 'Indian emigrant... Comrade' Pandurang S. Khankhoji, a national revolutionary and agronomist. Ramirez suggested that the 'emigrant' could be sent to Berlin for consultation before returning to India (Khankhoji apparently later travelled to Kabul and assumed a leading position in the Hindustan Ghadr Party) (RGASPI 542/1/48, 43, 30/1–1931). Although the LAI had adjusted to the changing circumstances of the 1930s and sought to fulfil its role as a hub, two incidents on a personal and organizational level in 1931 set the organization on an uneven course.

The Case against Chatto

On 20 April 1931 the ECCI Political Commission had a meeting in Moscow where accusations against Chatto were discussed before jurisdiction was given to the International Control Commission (ICC, the Comintern's internal repressive organ and cadre supervisor) (RGASPI 495/4/101, 2, 20/4–1931). The accuser's identity remains unknown, but based on information in Chatto's personal file in the Comintern archive the accusations were associated with Chatto's activities and involvement in the anti-British movement, organized by the German government during the First World War, as well as his relationship with Roy (who had been expelled from the Comintern in November 1929 and was regarded as *persona non grata*). To remedy the situation, the ECCI Political Commission decided to summon Chatto to Moscow in May. However, Chatto did not leave Berlin until August, and during the summer of 1931 he transferred his connections with Indian activists and students to Ferdi at the International Secretariat (RGASPI 495/4/119, 1–8, 3/7–1931). Barooah, Chatto's biographer, argues that due to pressure from the German police, Chatto was forced to leave Berlin and was left with Moscow as the only other option (Barooah 2004: 283). Given that the entire affair was instigated in Moscow and not exclusively linked to the German authorities, Barooah's interpretation is erroneous.

Upon arriving in Moscow, Chatto was faced with the charge of cooperating with the German 'Kaiser Government' in 1914–18. Chatto responded to these charges by compiling a perfunctory biography, in which he writes about his life as a devoted national revolutionary who operated under the guise of communism. This biography was handed to the ICC on 15 October. In part denouncing and adjusting his career to refute the accusations, Chatto stated:

In the course of my political activities during the last 25 years there is one period which has been the subject of suspicion and criticism . . . this suspicion has naturally caused a number of comrades to withhold from me the confidence to which I am entitled . . . I feel that it would be a loss to the Indian Party if I were to be hampered by the absence of full trust and confidence on the part of the Comintern, which will always find in me an uncompromising, devoted and disciplined worker prepared to carry out its programme under all circumstances. (RGASPI 495/213/186, 215–28, 15/10–1931)

The accusations became a stigma that never left Chatto. At a time when the Soviet Union was heading for complete sociopolitical overhaul (industrialization, collectivization), Chatto was prohibited from leaving the country. Chatto was caught in the bloody whirlwind that resulted from the Stalinist concept of building socialism in one country. The large-scale purging of the

Communist Party of the Soviet Union (the Bolsheviks) culminated in the Great Terror of 1937–8 (Getty and Naumov 1999). The last entry in Chatto's personal file is dated 11 October 1936, and on 2 September 1937 he was executed in Moscow at the moment when the Comintern purged its apparatus (Baroah 2004: 314–27).

Chatto's death meant the loss of one of the most active freedom fighters in India, and with him disappeared a multitude of networks and knowledge on the structure of the anti-imperialist movement. The elimination of an important historical figure in the anti-imperialist movement also meant that a significant piece of history was, until recently, lost.

Police Raid

On 21 December 1931 the Berlin Schutzpolizei raided the International Secretariat, an incident that exposed the LAI's intricate role as a hub and put an end to its cover as a sympathizing organization. Since its foundation in Brussels in 1927, police authorities in Berlin had monitored the LAI's activities, but up until the end of 1931 they had not been able to establish a clear case against the organization. Berlin in the 1930s had become a hotbed of revolutionary activism for both the extreme right and the left. With economic depression and massive unemployment, the NSDAP was emerging as a powerful political actor (Weitz 2007: 331–60). As noted in a report on 20 August 1930, the Berlin Chief of police was convinced that while more substantial evidence was needed, the LAI was an 'international organization connected to the Comintern' (SAPMO BA-ZPA R1501/20200, 19, 20/8–1930). The Berlin police attempted to limit the activities of the organization by issuing a decree that prohibited the LAI and other subversive organizations, particularly those with a leftist disposition, from using public spaces for their purposes in Berlin (SAPMO BA-ZPA R1501/20200, 20, 25/8–1930). Strict surveillance was another method used to contain subversive organizations. After collecting sufficient evidence on the 'communist character' of the LAI, the Schutzpolizei raided the International Secretariat on the morning of 21 December 1931. As a consequence of the raid, sixteen individuals were arrested and every document and 'scrap of paper' was seized.⁴ Hans Thogersen ('York'; 'Miller'), half-Danish, half-Japanese, a Comintern functionary and LAI youth secretary, later wrote that the raid 'retarded us to a great extent [and] the Office is rather "dead" just now' (RGASPI 542/1/56, 2, 21/1–1932). According to Thogersen, the individuals at the office included six Germans (among them, Ella Windmüller, 'Odette', Frieda Schiff), one American, the British communist Clemens Dutt, two Polish (Valnitsky and 'Bob', real name: Joseph Berger), one Bulgarian, one Japanese (Teido Kunizaki) and one Turkish citizen (Ferdi),

4 The number of those arrested corresponds with Thogersen's account, the report of the chief of police (31 December) and the ensuing campaign in the communist press in Germany.

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Confirmed
pseudonyms are
given within quotes.

as estimated the police; and of the sixteen arrested, five possessed invalid or fake passports. When describing the procedure and effects of the raid, Thogersen occasionally used the pseudonyms of the persons present at the International Secretariat; consequently, uncovering the identities of several individuals has proven impossible (RGASPI 542/1/56, 2, 21/1–1932; SAPMO BA-ZPA R1501/20200, 76, 82–3, 22–31/12–1931). The evidence exposing the communist nature of the LAI was given to the provincial governments in Germany by the Berlin police in January 1932 (SAPMO BA-ZPA R1501/20200, 162, 18/1–1932). Whether or not it was a coordinated effort, police authorities in Hamburg stormed the office of the ITUNWC/Hamburg Committee on 23 December (Rüger 1967: 796). The documents seized from the International Secretariat shed additional light on how the LAI acted as a hub and revealed Chatto's significance in the anti-imperialist movement in Berlin. Some of the documents also found their way to Comintern secretary Osip Piatnitsky, which indicates that high-ranking persons at Comintern headquarters carefully monitored how the activities of the LAI progressed.

Focal Points of Entry

The LAI wanted to find individuals who were not only qualified to perform the organization's legwork (disseminate propaganda, act as couriers) in the colonies, but who were also capable of undertaking political tasks in Berlin and in their home country. The 1931 police raid provided intelligence on the LAI network, exposing a structure which surprised even the authorities. The Berlin police concluded that the LAI 'supported an extensive net of confidential individuals, covering the whole world' (SAPMO BA-ZPA R1501/20200, 77–80, 24/12–1931). With respect to Berlin, there were three focal points of entry into the anti-imperialist hub (as envisioned by the LAI) for anticolonial activists: (1) scan the field in Europe for students from the colonies sympathetic to the anti-imperialist movement; (2) establish links with colonial individuals involved in day-to-day anti-imperialist activism; (3) find journalists working for the colonial press stationed in Berlin and Europe. For example, the Japanese communist Teido Kunizaki, who was one of the individuals arrested in the police raid, was a student at Humboldt University in 1926. In late 1928, Kunizaki joined the KPD and formed the reading circle known as the Japanische Sprachgruppe der KPD in Berlin, becoming a close associate of Sen Katayama, the leading figure in the Japanese communist movement (Fowler 2007: 89). When the Berlin police sifted through the evidence obtained from the raid, they came across a detailed report that contained

5 The report was compiled by Chatto on 5 November 1930 and sent by Smeral at the International Secretariat to Piatnitsky in Moscow. The report arrived in Moscow on 6 November (RGASPI 495/19/312, 38–42, 5/11–1930). The copy found by the Schutzpolizei is filed as SAPMO-BA ZPA R1501/20200, 111–15, 1930.

thirteen particular topics, revealing how the LAI projected itself as the anti-imperialist hub towards the end of 1930.⁵

In January 1929 Chatto established a comprehensive platform, directed via the International Secretariat, which was aimed exclusively at Indian national revolutionaries. This was a mutual arrangement. Historian Milton Israel analysed Nehru's connections with Chatto during this period, and concluded that Nehru's experience from the Brussels congress in 1927 had proven to him that it was essential to nourish 'associations with radical movements in the West'. In this respect, the LAI was the key actor because it was in the possession of international contacts that could be mobilized to participate in organized 'letter-writing campaigns'. Nehru also convinced the Indian National Congress to sanction Chatto's plan to establish and fund the Indian Students' Information Bureau in Berlin in February 1929 (the LAI called it the Indian Bureau). Chatto and A. C. N. Nambiar, an Indian journalist and nationalist, controlled the Indian Bureau. Nambiar worked as a correspondent for the Free Press of India agency, covering Berlin, Moscow and Central Europe as his main fields. Nambiar was married to one of Chatto's sisters, Suhasini, and Chatto had arranged for their travel to Berlin from London in May 1923 (Israel 1994: 259–60; Barooah 2004: 190).

The International Secretariat looked on the Indian Bureau as the 'centre to extract' and find colonial students in Berlin, meaning to conscript the 'best and reliable' individuals for the sole purpose of circulating 'journals, books, and other literature' on the LAI in India. The Indian Bureau was a small one, but Chatto and Nambiar believed the 'student colony' to be under their control. Furthermore, the links of the International Secretariat to the Zentral Komitee des KPD in Berlin were used to arrange curricular seminars on Marxism, led by the scholar and communist Karl August Wittfogel (involved in the LAI since the 1927 Brussels congress). For example, on 11 November 1930, Wittfogel was scheduled to hold a seminar at the Deutsche Hochschule für Politik in Berlin on 'The Agrarian Politics' in the context of the colonial question. Earlier that year, in the summer of 1930, Wittfogel held seminars with a group of Oxford students in Berlin on Marxism and the colonial revolution. During the summer seminars, Chatto enrolled Sahibsadeh, an Oxford student from India. After the last seminar, Sahibsadeh was instructed by Chatto to travel to India immediately on a mission of unknown character. The results of the 'Oxford seminar' were so positive that Chatto suggested to Piatnitsky that a similar should be inaugurated at Oxford University (RGASPI 495/19/312, 38–42, 5/11–1930).

Finding Indian contacts among those living in or passing through Berlin was an endeavour largely made possible by Chatto and Nambiar's connections with the Indian anti-colonial movement. An array of individuals from India (in most cases unidentifiable) surfaced in the confiscated report. For example, Ghosch from Calcutta and a student in London, whose father

worked as a diplomat, gained access to British discussions on India at governmental level; Sengupta was purportedly a member of a 'terrorist-like group'; Khosla, a 'young man' from Lahore, conducted studies at Manchester University but was linked to terrorist movements in India; Yagnik from Bombay had an interest in the 'peasant question'; Sinha had a longstanding affiliation with peasant movements in India (RGASPI 495/19/312, 38–42, 5/11–1930). The identities of these individuals have vanished over time.

However, India was not the LAI's sole focus according to Chatto's report. Connections with Arab activists were valuable to the International Secretariat. When Chatto met Muzahim Beg Ali Pachachi (the Iraqi diplomatic representative in London and leader of the Iraqi Nationalist Party) in Berlin in early 1930, he was told that a group of Iraqi students intended to visit Berlin. Chatto believed these Iraqi students would serve as the perfect representatives for the Pan-Islamic movement. According to Chatto, the journalist Hajj Muhammad Jalabi was the most 'active and intelligent' Arab and Pan-Islamist tied to the LAI in Berlin, where Jalabi's abilities could potentially be of great use in Wittfogel's seminars. Abdur Rauf Malik, another Arab student, had recently written a history thesis on Islamic nationalism. However, according to Chatto, Malik was under the spell of 'Gandhiesque illusions' and was therefore of little use to the LAI. Bilé's contacts with the International Secretariat focused primarily on the African colony in Berlin; for example, his contacts brought Nangange from Duala and Viktor Bell in touch with the LAI (RGASPI 495/19/312, 38–42, 5/11–1930).

Nevertheless, family ties proved to be thicker than water. Sarojini Naidu's son, M. J. S. Naidu, lived in Berlin and was in contact with the LAI. Though Sarojini Naidu, known as the 'Nightingale of India', was a writer and an avid Indian nationalist with close and personal ties to Nehru, she was also Chatto's second sister. Despite M. J. S. Naidu's 'sympathies' towards the LAI, Chatto concluded that he was 'confused and needed further education' (RGASPI 495/19/312, 38–42, 5/11–1930). After the police raid, any traces of Naidu's connection with the LAI vanished. However, two incidental explanations provide a more elaborate account of Naidu's Berlin experience. First, it is reasonable to assume that when Chatto was summoned to Moscow and left Berlin in August 1931, he had not only severed all ties with the LAI but also with his family. A second explanation is that Naidu remained active well up until the seizure of power by the NSDAP on 30 January 1933. While working with Nambiar, Naidu was pulled into the repressive measures taken by the German government in its effort to suppress subversive communist and socialist organizations. Many students and political activists from the colonies were deported, and among them were Nambiar and Naidu (Israel 1994: 275). Even so, the ties of the LAI had become seriously damaged since the beginning of 1932. As outlined above,

Chatto's summons to Moscow and the damning and revealing repercussions of the police raid forced the LAI to undergo drastic changes. In order to sustain itself the LAI had to find new means of supporting and preserving the limited base of its activity. In a sense, the raid forced the LAI to cease operating as a public actor in Berlin and across Germany, which in turn altered the setting for the anti-imperialist movement. Above all, the raid put an end to its ability to function as the connective centre for anticolonial activists in Berlin, and consequently in Europe and beyond. On 19 January 1932 the ECCI Secretariat in Moscow declared that the International Secretariat had to prepare itself for clandestine activity and exist in a secretive and reclusive fashion in Berlin (RGASPI 542/1/54, 23, 19/1–1932).

Postscript: Legacy of the LAI

On 1 April 1932 the International Secretariat relocated to another address in Berlin, 13 Hedemannstrasse. While documents seized by the Schutzpolizei from the December raid served the main purpose of exposing the LAI as the 'centre for international communist propaganda', they also demonstrated that the organization was the connective hub for 'foreign communist fugitives' in dire need of material (passports) and financial assistance. To make matters worse, the densely knit international network, which was comprised of individuals and national sections, was no longer a secret.

The LAI was not the only organization to suffer from the ramifications of the Berlin police raid. The activities of the WEB were also affected. The evidence from the raid made known to the Berlin police for the first time that an actor like the WEB existed in the Weimar capital (SAPMO BA-ZPA R1501/20200, 116, 14/3–1932; 120–1, 18/3).

In 1932 the International Secretariat was a shadow of its former self. The LAI was involved in the political groundwork for the Amsterdam Anti-War Congress, which convened on 27–29 August, with the French authors Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland acting as the leaders of the anti-war movement. The anti-war message of the congress was transformed in 1933 into what was later known as the Amsterdam-Pleyel Movement (Carr 1982: 387–90; RGASPI 543/1/17).

The International Secretariat began to crumble under the weight of growing antagonism from the police authorities and the NSDAP in Berlin, and by the beginning of 1933 it consisted only of a few committed individuals. On 30 January 1933, the day Hitler was appointed as Reich Chancellor, the International Secretariat held its last meeting in Berlin. In accordance with the recommendations from the leader of the WEB, 'Helmut' (pseudonym used by Dimitrov), Clemens Dutt, Ferdi, and the German IAH functionary Allo Bayer made the unanimous decision to dismantle the office.



While Dutt and Ferdi hastily fled Berlin and travelled to Moscow, Bayer was responsible for transferring the LAI archive to Paris (it is unknown if the shipment made it across the German–French border) and disposing of all sensitive documents remaining before dividing up the last of the International Secretariat’s financial reserves (RGASPI 542/1/60, 39–49, 1/4–1933). After the Reichstag fire on 27 February, the police initiated a clear-out of communist locations in Berlin and throughout Germany. In mid-March the police raided the International Secretariat at 13 Hedemannstrasse, only to find the office empty and abandoned (SAPMO BA-ZPA R1501/20200, 16/3–1933).⁶

6 Paris was the next operative centre for the International Secretariat, which turned out to be a temporary solution. In August 1933, after repeated requests from Münzenberg to be relieved of his duties and asking Piatnitsky to listen to him, the political commission endorsed the decision to transfer the International Secretariat to London under Reginald Bridgeman’s

Although the disintegration of the LAI and the end of the anti-imperialist movement in Berlin were logical consequences of the NSDAP coming to power, the impact of the organization and its network had been increasingly restricted since early 1932. The collapse of the organization in Berlin meant its activists were scattered across the world; later, they would die in the trenches in Moscow, be forcibly exiled to the Gulag, be killed under mysterious circumstances, or exist as political émigrés. The dispersal and literal disappearance of these activists contributed partly to the ‘lost history’ of the LAI. Fowler argues that the isolation of activists in communist movements, which originated from intra-party struggles, or outside factors such as harassment and repercussions, partly explains why some of the individuals of interwar labour, anti-war and anticolonial history are either neglected or ignored (Fowler 2007: 201). The extent of the LAI’s success has mostly been measured in quantitative terms; rather than evaluating the qualitative character of the organization, its success has been determined by assessing the total number of members and the breadth of its political impact. When one moves away from this quantitative evaluation of the LAI, the question to consider is what kind of legacy did the LAI leave behind.

The LAI did not have a happy ending, an undeniable fact that places a stigma on its legacy. The manner in which the organization finished, which arguably occurred when the office was physically dismantled in February 1933, casts a lasting shadow on its memory. Nevertheless, one must acknowledge that of all the anti-imperialist movements that emerged after the First World War, the LAI was remembered as the first anti-imperialist endeavour that managed to bring together organizations, associations and individuals who were key players in the struggle against colonialism and imperialism. The factor that sets the LAI apart from other anti-imperialist organizations is that its communist connotations were stripped away, and its leading figures – Münzenberg and Chatto – were forgotten. For some individuals, their experience as active members of the LAI made for what was, without a doubt, a lifelong source of knowledge.

The legacy of the LAI was twofold. On the one hand, a majority of the individuals in charge of creating the LAI as an anti-imperialist centre and

hub in Berlin had perished. On the other hand, the networks assumed new forms and characteristics after the Second World War. Rediscovering the LAI and assembling its ‘lost history’ is a vital undertaking that provides an in-depth understanding of the historiography of international communism, colonialism, and imperialism in the twentieth century that leads to postcolonialism.

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