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# The India League and the Condition of India: Agnotological Imperialism, Colonial State Violence and the Making of Anticolonial Knowledge 1930–4

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## Abstract

This article explores the 1932 visit to India of a delegation of Labour party figures associated with the India League, a prominent anticolonial organisation based in London, charged with investigating the colonial state violence unleashed by ‘Ordinance Rule’. It also examines efforts taken by the Government of India, India Office and Indian Political Intelligence to suppress their findings, through which it explores a dialectic between anticolonial knowledge-making and agnotological imperialism, which often took the form of the latter ‘exceptioning’ examples produced by the former of excessive colonial state violence. It offers the conclusion that the contradictions between liberal imperialism and the rule of colonial difference and repression in the age of mass nationalism in India and mass democracy in Britain meant that liberal imperialism in India increasingly flowed, paradoxically, from illiberalism in Britain.

**Keywords:** anticolonialism; agnotology; liberal imperialism; colonial violence; India League

There she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent.  
Joseph Conrad describing a French warship off the coast of Africa,  
*Heart of Darkness*<sup>1</sup>

I had had to think out my problems in the utter silence that is imposed on  
every Englishman in the East.  
George Orwell, *Shooting an Elephant*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Owen Knowles and Allan H. Simmons (Cambridge, 2016), 14.

<sup>2</sup> George Orwell, ‘Shooting an Elephant’, in *Essays*, ed. John Carey (2002), 237.

## Introduction

In 1932 the India League, by then developing into one of the most prominent anticolonial organisations in interwar Britain,<sup>3</sup> sponsored a delegation of four Labour Party members (including the well-known Ellen Wilkinson) to India. Their hope, in line with the long-term strategy of the India League, was that the delegation's findings would help fight public ignorance of 'Un-British'<sup>4</sup> methods of rule in the subcontinent and thereby generate public support in Britain for India's claim to political freedom.<sup>5</sup> The delegation travelled extensively and interviewed villagers, Congress Party volunteers and leaders, policemen, colonial officials and even the Viceroy. Despite the efforts of the government to limit who they met and what they saw, the delegation left with an impression of an oppressive and exploitative imperialism that maintained inhuman labour conditions and feudal land tenure through brutal state violence in the prisons and especially on the street.

Their dissenting version became the basis of a book, the *Condition of India*,<sup>6</sup> parliamentary questions, articles in the British (left-wing) press, and speeches at India League and Labour Party Conferences. Despite the strenuous and unconstitutional efforts of the India Office to repress its findings in Britain, the delegation's visit and subsequent publications have been described by historians as a 'coup' for the India League, as having a dramatic impact on Labour party thinking and a still-relevant indictment of Britain's colonial record.<sup>7</sup> So far, the *Condition of India* has only been the focus of one study, a section of an article that addresses it from the perspective of the history of the book and it has therefore never been placed in conversation with major imperial and colonial historiographical debates.<sup>8</sup>

This article investigates the production of the *Condition of India* as an example of anticolonial knowledge-making on the subject of empire, with a particular focus on colonial violence. It also investigates the strategies that the India Office and Government of India used to repress and counter the

<sup>3</sup> Note on Vengali Krishnan Krishna Menon [n.d.] British Library/India Office Records [hereafter BL/IOR]/L/P&J/12/323.

<sup>4</sup> Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi [hereafter NMML]/Annie Besant Papers (Microfilm) [hereafter ABP]/Part II/14c-D-19, *Home Rule for India League: Pamphlet No. 1: What India Wants* (n.d., probably 1916).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> See The India League (in this case, Leonard Matters, V. K. Krishna Menon, Bertrand Russell (foreword), Ellen Wilkinson and Monica Whately), *The Condition of India: Being the Report of the Delegation sent by the India League, in 1932 (1934)* [hereafter IL, COI].

<sup>7</sup> See, respectively, Nicholas Owens, *The British Left and India: Metropolitan Anti-Imperialism 1885-1942* (Oxford, 2007), 208; Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire 1918-1964* (Oxford, 1993), 129; and Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (2002), 329.

<sup>8</sup> See Jack Bowman, 'The Early Political Thought and Publishing Career of V. K. Krishna Menon, 1928-1938', *The Historical Journal*, 66 (2023), 641-65. There have only been a few comprehensive studies of interwar British anticolonialism, see Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement 1914-1964* (Cambridge, 1975); Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*; Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial resistance and British Dissent* (2020); and Owens, *The British Left and India*.

League's findings in order to examine British imperialism as a project of conscious and active ignorance-making, or agnotology. The principal argument in this case is that when the two epistemic projects of anticolonial knowledge and imperial ignorance-making compete it is not around the facticity of event or phenomenon, but rather its *generalisability*. A case of excessive and exemplary colonial violence was, for the anticolonialist, an exemplification of imperialism, whereas to the empire, it was a regrettable and necessary exception to an imperialism that was liberal, civilised and civilising.

A secondary, methodological, argument is that anticolonial knowledge-making projects are useful historical resources for supporting decolonial histories of empire, especially on topics where colonial archives might be silent, such as colonial violence. A central section of this article therefore surveys the *Condition of India's* investigation of colonial violence as lawless, exemplary and profoundly 'Un-British'. This helps us uncover the ways in which the 'rule of colonial difference',<sup>9</sup> to borrow from Partha Chatterjee, produced a state of exception that in turn enabled brutal state violence. Even as liberal imperialism made universalist claims to civilise, the enduring difference between the European and the colonial subject permitted methods of colonial rule that would be inappropriate at home. This was an uncivilised violence that therefore had to be denied even as it was committed. The India League's anticolonial witnessing therefore forced the colonial state into clear and contorted denials of its own violence and, as a result, is powerfully revealing of liberal imperialism's dependence on both exemplary violence and its disavowal. This article first explores the twinned themes of anticolonial knowledge and imperial ignorance-making before applying them to the India League's visit to India, the (obscured) nature of colonial violence they found there, and the repression of the League's findings that followed its return to Britain. This repression forms a final argument: that the authoritarian empire in India increasingly depended on the limits of liberalism in Britain, including the weakness of individual MPs in Parliament, the power of the secret state and the deference shown by the press to government and empire.

### Anticolonial knowledge

Colonial knowledge-making is one of the principal themes in imperial history-writing and powerfully influences postcolonialism. It lexically implies a largely unexamined opposite: anticolonial knowledge-making. This is also suggested by the founding 'duty of the [India] League to spread among the people of the United Kingdom the knowledge which will convince them that they are ... bound to co-operate with India in the establishment of Home Rule'. This anticolonial knowledge was to be of the illiberal 'un-British methods'<sup>10</sup> used by the colonial government in India. I do not intend to offer a *general theorisation*

<sup>9</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Delhi, 1994), 10, 19.

<sup>10</sup> 'Home Rule for India League: 'Pamphlet No. 1: What India Wants' (n.d., probably 1916), NMML/ABP/Part II/14c-D-19(5).

of anticolonial knowledge-making but to sketch some ways in which the key insights into colonial knowledge-making (which has been extensively studied<sup>11</sup>) can be used to explicate its mirrored other and in doing so, demonstrate the potential for both the empirical richness and theoretical possibility of anticolonial knowledge-making as a form of resistance to imperialism.

Colonial and anticolonial knowledge-making are both linked to political programmes, be it the discursive justifying or undermining of empire. Both claim the right to represent based on methodology or authoritative status (who *really* knows India? Statistic-wielding colonial officials or the Indians themselves?). In the colonial case, the ethnographic state produced knowledge that informed governmental modalities and often distorted colonial societies as a result. Anticolonial knowledge *might* produce a dissenting valorisation of 'native' society and culture as a political resource, but it also produced an inverted ethnography of empire: its peculiarities, personnel and methods. The *Condition of India*, for example, includes investigations into colonial prisons instead of cadastral surveys, dissects colonial law rather than 'native' customs and instead of an ethnography of the castes and tribes of India, studies one particular collectivity: the colonial police and its habits of violence.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike the ethnographic *Raj*, the India League had no recourse to the authority or power of the state and therefore transmitted its anticolonial knowledge through a network of transnational activist solidarity. The India League's core leadership and membership mixed sympathetic Britons with diasporic Indians but its network substantially exceeded this, allowing it to draw on Congress for information and rediffuse it through its British allies in the Independent Labour Party, Trades Union movement, Communist Party, left-wing press and the Labour Party, including many MPs. By the end of the war the League's public meetings were drawing thousands and it had branches all over Britain. At various times it could also count on the membership or support of many Britons and others who were prominent in public or political life: newspapermen such as Kingsley Martin at the *New Statesman*, public intellectuals such as Bertrand Russell and Harold Laski, as well as Labour politicians such as Aneurin Bevan and Sir Stafford Cripps. It was also supported by the African American antiracist and popular musician Paul Robeson, the celebrated actress Sybil Thorndike and the 'Red Earl' of Huntingdon, an artistic disciple of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The literature is vast, but landmark studies include Bernard S. Cohn and (ed.), *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ, 2022); Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, NJ, 2011); Peter Van Der Veer and Carol Breckenridge (eds.), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Philadelphia, PA, 1993) and most explosively, Edward Said, *Orientalism* (2003).

<sup>12</sup> IL, COI, passim.

<sup>13</sup> NMML/Krishna Menon Papers[hereafter KMP]/191, Minutes of the Meeting of the Secretariat, India League, 6 Jan. 1943; NMML/KMP/188, Secretary's Report to the Council of the India League, 17 Jan. 1932; NMML/KMP/177, 'Memorandum on India League Reception for Nehru at Kingsway Hall', 27 Jun. 1938, BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/293.

## Imperial agnotology

When the dissemination of anticolonial knowledge directly threatened the colonial state, it naturally moved to repress it. While this usually took place in the colony where censorship would be crudely determinant, in the case of the India League it took place in liberal Britain where ignorance-production was more subtle but also more critical. This was because Gandhian civil disobedience in India had prompted a contradictory rise in both repressive state violence *and* the claims of liberal imperialism as the justification for empire in the face of his challenge.<sup>14</sup> In her study of the interwar covert empire in the Middle East, Priya Satia finds the term ‘agnotology’ to be a ‘useful means of describing the strategy behind official secrecy about empire in an age of mass democracy’.<sup>15</sup> Coined by Robert Proctor, agnotology is the study of deliberately or socially produced doubt and ignorance that reveals the ‘historicity and artifactuality of non-knowing’.<sup>16</sup> It can be distinguished from false belief by its *deliberate* production, which evokes Charles Mill’s notion of a racialised ignorance that does not passively retreat in the face of enlightenment, but ‘fights back’.<sup>17</sup> Based on this, ‘an agnotological approach seeks to dissect the ignorance production methods and tactics of messengers of disinformation’,<sup>18</sup> which might include censorship but also propaganda, especially that which *manufactures doubt*. Crucially, agnotological studies investigate the power and interests served by the production of ignorance: Paul Gilroy calls for ‘a new corrective disciplinary perspective that interprets the power that arises from the command of *not knowing*’.<sup>19</sup>

The importance of agnotology to British power in India can be demonstrated by its institutionalisation into specialist and global bureaucracies of censorship and propaganda. The Government of India devoted considerable resources to censorship and press control and enjoyed a cosy relationship with Reuters which prevented embarrassing stories or criticisms from reaching Britain.<sup>20</sup> It also had recourse to the Delhi Intelligence Bureau and the Information Officers of both the Government of India and the India Office in London, which also housed Indian Political Intelligence (IPI). Founded in 1909 and funded by Indian taxes, IPI mostly spied on Indians outside India. Surveillance served

<sup>14</sup> Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, NJ, 2010), 11.

<sup>15</sup> Priya Satia, ‘Inter-War Agnotology: Empire, Democracy and the Production of Ignorance’, in *Brave New World: Imperial and Democratic Nation-Building in Britain between the Wars*, ed. Laura Beers and Thomas Geraint (2011), 218.

<sup>16</sup> Robert N. Proctor, ‘Postscript on the Coining of the Term “Agnotology”’, in *Agnotology: the Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, ed. Robert Proctor and Londa Schiebinger (Stanford, CA, 2008), 27.

<sup>17</sup> See Charles Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism* (Oxford, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Tom Slater, ‘Agnotology’, in *Keywords in Radical Geography: Antipode at 50*, ed. Antipode Editorial Collective (Hoboken, NJ, 2019), 21.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Gilroy, ‘The Crises of Multiculturalism?’ Paper presented to the ‘Challenging the Parallel Lives Myth: Race, Sociology, Statistics and Politics’ Conference Proceeding, London School of Economics (5.2009).

<sup>20</sup> Chandrika Kaul, *Reporting the Raj: The British Press and India c. 1880–1922* (Manchester, 2003), 46.

agnotology as IPI dossiers were supplied to imperial, American and European police services to justify the arrest, deportation or conscription of anticolonial Indians, to subject them to forced labour, to swing judicial cases against them,<sup>21</sup> and, as is demonstrated below, to bolster imperialist claims made by the press and right-wing political groups in Britain in order to discredit and silence Indian activists and their British allies. IPI also, notably, provided funding and information to the British Library of Information in New York, which worked to counter politically active Indians in the United States, a reminder that the imperial agnotological network exceeded empire itself.<sup>22</sup> Even if accounts of colonial violence reached Britain, there was a well-established journalistic practice in Britain of seeking ‘balance’ between these and official views. This culture of deference gave official self-justification a powerful role in determining what was ‘objectively true’ about empire and automatically ascribing to anticolonial claims the label of ‘one sided’, thus preserving a biased balance that protected empire from its critics. The India League was aware of this: at a meeting held in 1930 an India League speaker denounced the ‘censorship of news by the proprietors of the “Yellow Press” who were engaged in ‘the shielding of British interests in India’.<sup>23</sup>

### The India League, the dual policy and the agnotological empire

While the League was kept informed by private correspondence much of this was lost to postal censors and therefore, overall, the League felt that the ‘information we get from India is very scanty’.<sup>24</sup> It was particularly hard to get information on colonial violence: Both Satia and Mills agree that one the most comprehensive projects of historical ignorance-making has been about the excessive nature of colonial violence.<sup>25</sup> In 1932 the League hoped to correct this by holding an exhibition on colonial violence to be held in the House of Commons which included a sample *lathi*, the iron-bound wooden truncheon that was universally used by the police in India, often to attack *satyagrahis*, the volunteers in Gandhi’s non-violent civil disobedience campaign. This exhibition was based on the fear of the Secretary of the India League, V. K. Krishna Menon, that ‘most people [in Britain] think a *lathi* is a light piece of bamboo which cannot even hurt the skin’.<sup>26</sup> Peter Freeman, a former chairman of the India League, had visited India and brought one back to show at public meetings. Menon believed ‘the most effective part of his argument was the *lathi* which he showed to his audience and banged on the table.

<sup>21</sup> IPI to W. Croft and D. Monteath, 21 Nov. 1946, BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/662. See BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/489, IPI to Silver, 1 Feb. 1943; BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455, IPI to Silver, 9 Jan. 1943; BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/645, IPI to Silver, 1 Feb. 1943; BL/IOR/L/PJ/12/455, BL/IOR//L/PJ/12/325–341, BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/1295.

<sup>22</sup> See BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/781.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Extract from New Scotland Yard Report’ [hereafter ENSYR] 25 Jun. 1930, BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/356.

<sup>24</sup> Menon to M. M. Malaviya, 23 Apr. 1932, NMML/KMP/567.

<sup>25</sup> Priya Satia, ‘Inter-War Agnotology’ and Charles Mills, ‘Global White Ignorance’, in *Routledge Book of Ignorance Studies*, ed. Matthias Gross and Linsey McGoey (New York, 2015), 218, 222.

<sup>26</sup> Menon to M. M. Malaviya, 23 Apr. 1932, NMML/KMP/567.

People were horrorstruck. We have therefore decided to plan an exhibition ... showing the weapons and methods used in the maintenance of law and order in India.<sup>27</sup> The exhibition would also include photographs of police atrocities and of injured persons, 'originals or copies of orders of a particularly iniquitous nature', as well as evidence of 'government attacks on the Red Cross' and 'places of worship, including Moslem mosques' as well as 'attacks on children and boys'.<sup>28</sup>

The India League enjoyed the cooperation of several Labour MPs who used parliamentary questions and speeches to spread its anticolonial knowledge. For example, Menon managed to have David Grenfell MP read out an 'eleven hundred word cable' that accused the British government of presenting a picture of India that was 'incorrect and misleading' because the reality was 'brutal revolting repression' with 'volunteers beaten half dead then left on road stripped of all clothes ... persons beaten even after their becoming senseless ... even small boys whipped'.<sup>29</sup> The telegram had been provided to the India League by a Congress leader, Mohan Madan Malaviya, which was a small miracle given the activity of the censors.<sup>30</sup> The speech alarmed the India Office but the problem remained that even if the League managed, despite all the odds, to lay such information before the House of Commons it could be easily dismissed by the Secretary of State citing the authority of government information.<sup>31</sup> Menon conveyed an example of this to Malaviya, noting how an 'MP who has come back from India tells the same tale of repression ... but of course Lord Lothian [Under-Secretary of State for India] can "correct" all this if he is so inclined'. The problem was that India League-affiliated MPs might not have even visited India, making their account appear less credible than the seemingly authoritative one provided by ministers or retired colonial officers now sitting on the Conservative backbenches. To overcome this disadvantage that anticolonial knowledge-making had in competing with the agnotological empire, the League found 'that what is wanted is that there should be someone who can stand up in the Chamber itself and challenge the Secretary of State on personal knowledge. We are therefore considering the idea of proposing a deputation consisting of at least one MP'.<sup>32</sup>

The original idea for a delegation came, however, from Madeleine Slade, the spiritual devotee of Gandhi whom the Mahatma had renamed Mira Behn. She also believed that the official and press version being presented in Britain bore no resemblance to the horrors of colonial state violence that she was seeing in India.<sup>33</sup> At this point it is crucial to note that the violence that she was witnessing was *deliberately* created as one wing of the 'Dual Policy'. As the Home

<sup>27</sup> Menon to M. M. Malaviya, 2 Apr. 1932, NMML/KMP/567.

<sup>28</sup> 'Copy of a Strictly Confidential Memorandum, No. 1196/C from Madras Special Branch', 21 Apr. 1932, BL/IOR/L/P&j/12/448.

<sup>29</sup> House of Commons Debate [Hereafter: HC Deb], vol. 263 col. 1209, 20 Mar. 1939, *Hansard*.

<sup>30</sup> Menon to M. M. Malaviya, 6 Mar. 1932, NMML/KMP/567 and Govind Malaviya to Menon, 6 Jan. 1932, NMML/KMP/567.

<sup>31</sup> Menon to M. M. Malaviya, 18 Mar. 1932, NMML/KMP/567.

<sup>32</sup> Menon to M. M. Malaviya, 9 Apr. 1932, NMML/KMP/567.

<sup>33</sup> Mira Behn to Tom Williams, 7, 8 and 9 Jan. 1932, NMML/KMP/566.

Member of the Government of India, Harry Haig, put it to the Prime Minister, the reaching of 'practical conclusions about the constitution [was] ...the constructive side of the "dual policy"...side by side with this we must maintain the other wing of this dual policy, we must defeat the menace of civil disobedience'. This was achieved by promulgating a series of ordinances which Haig admitted amounted to 'a species of martial law administered by civil officers'.<sup>34</sup>

The other 'wing' of the Dual Policy was also the latest episode in India's process of constitutional reform. After the 1857 revolution compelled the Crown to take power from the East India Company, successive Acts had involved some few Indians in advisory councils while ultimately preserving the absolute power of the Viceroy and Governors. In 1909 and again in 1919 Liberal Secretaries of State increased Indian representation in assemblies of limited power, accompanied by an emerging system of 'dyarchy' where the pleasanter portfolios (sanitation, education, public work) might be transferred to Indian ministers while the commanding heights of finance and security (along with considerable reserve powers of veto and promulgation) remained vested in British officials.

The 1919 reforms had included the provision for a decennial review, which was brought forward by the Conservatives to keep it out of the hands of Labour<sup>35</sup> and took the form of the all-British Simon Commission. This was boycotted in India and produced some very limited proposals which the new Labour Prime Minister, James Ramsay MacDonald, refused to be bound. He instead summoned a series of Round Table Conferences to discuss progress towards dominion status in which he intended to include the all-important power of 'responsibility at the centre'.<sup>36</sup> Congress had boycotted the first Conference, only been allowed to send a single delegate (Gandhi) to the second, and was banned during the third, reducing it to a farce. Meanwhile, Labour weakness and the formation of the National Government meant that Conservatives were increasingly able to dominate proceedings. Amidst a dangerous diehard revolt led by Winston Churchill, Sir Samuel Hoare, the Conservative Secretary of State for India, oversaw the production of the 1935 Government of India Act. This was drafted by a Joint Parliamentary Committee, which contained no Indians at all and limited 'responsibility' to the provinces, made no mention of the promised 'dominion status' and ensured that the next step, an all-India Federation, would be conditional on the voluntary involvement of the reliably loyalist Indian princes. Federation never actually happened and elections to the reformed assemblies were only called in 1937, producing a Congress landslide. Two years later (justified by war) the Act's major concessions were annulled at a stroke.

The other wing of the Dual Policy was Haig's 'civil martial law', enacted through a series of repressive Ordinances that would violently defeat civil

<sup>34</sup> Haig to Innes, 18 Jan. 1932 National Archives of India, Home(Political) Series [hereafter NAI/Home(Pol)].

<sup>35</sup> Lord Birkenhead to Lord Reading, 10 Dec. 1925, BL/IOR/L/PO/6/22.

<sup>36</sup> James Ramsay MacDonald, Diary Entry 23 Nov. 1931, cited in David Marquand, *James Ramsay MacDonald* (1977), 708.

disobedience and entice moderates and even Congress off the streets and into the elected institutions provided by the 'new constitution' being drafted in London.<sup>37</sup> In a sense, this was nothing new: the 1919 reforms had been accompanied by the Rowlatt Act which sought to normalise repressive wartime regulations and 'defend the process of constitutional reforms from those who might threaten it'.<sup>38</sup> These 'black acts', as Congress called them, were bitterly opposed and repealed (among other repressive measures) in 1922 without ever actually being implemented. While emergency acts had been used in 1857 and were held in reserve ever after, the Dual Policy implemented 'the first ever comprehensive Emergency Powers Ordinance the British ever issued'<sup>39</sup> under the Crown, in peacetime and on an all-India basis. The press was crushed, Congress proscribed, and its methods criminalised. Local officials were given draconian powers to arbitrarily detain or internally exile Indians, deprive them of property and harshly restrict their lives. The ability of the courts to review these acts was heavily curtailed, effectively indemnifying the colonial state from its spiralling excesses.<sup>40</sup> Civil martial law appears to have exercised as tight a control over Indian life as military rule would have, save only that the police did not formally hand over the responsibility of maintaining order to the army, lest that produce the fatal scandal of another Amritsar. Between that extreme and the deficiencies of the ordinary court-and-prison system (which was liable to become deliberately clogged by *satyagrahis*) civil martial law finessed a new form of extrajudicial state violence: the mass use of the 'lathi-charge': a public attack on protestors by baton-wielding police, designed to injure, terrify and deter but not kill Indian protestors. By avoiding the scandal of countable dead bodies, the colonial state could mask the intrinsic violence of the Dual Policy, although airpower and firepower were still used against certain social groups.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the two wings of the Dual Policy concretised the contradiction between the self-image of liberal imperialism and the violent reality of colonial rule, making agnotology increasingly important in squaring the circle, especially in Britain. Inadvertently, it also provided opportunities for anticolonial knowledge-making: The India League had already appealed to the Labour party not to participate in the 'constitutional process' because that implied that the party was 'consenting to the method of trying to affect a "constitutional settlement" with the bayonet and the lathi in full play at the same time'.<sup>42</sup> In late June the India League held a meeting on the Dual Policy at the House of Commons which drew 'a very large number of Members of Parliament', who were addressed by Harold Laski, and the Labour leader,

<sup>37</sup> Haig to Mieville 13 Apr. 1932, cited in D. A. Low, "'Civil Martial Law": The Government of India and the Civil Disobedience Movements, 1930–1934', in *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle 1914–1947*, ed. D. A. Low (New Delhi, 2004), 178.

<sup>38</sup> Durbah Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists: Political Violence and the Colonial State in India* (Cambridge, 2017), 32–3.

<sup>39</sup> Low, 'Civil Martial Law', 174.

<sup>40</sup> See NAI/Home(Pol) F13–14 ii (1932).

<sup>41</sup> Taylor C. Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India* (Abingdon, 2010), 77.

<sup>42</sup> Menon to George Lansbury, 26 Jan. 1932, NMML/KMP/419.

George Lansbury. Lansbury argued that the government's aim was to 'crush the Congress Party' through a 'policy of continued repression' alongside a 'settlement of constitutional issues without consultation or negotiation'. Laski dismissed the constitutional wing of the Dual Policy as unrepresentative and argued that Britain governed India 'nakedly by the sword' under the 'ancient philosophy' that racially separated Indians and sanctioned violence against them under the assumption that 'the Indian mind only understands the strong hand'. In countering Hoare's assertion that the Ordinances would be lawful, proportionate and necessary, in that they 'will operate when the situation demands', Laski invoked the ghosts of the Amritsar massacre: 'From reading in great detail the history of the Punjab under martial law in 1919 I know how such powers can be abused.'<sup>43</sup>

### Making the delegation

In the eyes of the India League, therefore, the delegation was created to expose the hollowness of a 'Dual Policy' that showcased 'civilised' liberal imperialism at the Round Table Conferences in London by producing anticolonial knowledge of the hidden violence of colonial rule in India. Before it could be formed, however, funds had to be secured and the League was, as ever, broke. When the wealthy Malaviya family was asked for support from India, the response was that 'people are not unwilling to contribute' and that 'many would give us thousands' but the 'ordinances are being so ... vindictively enforced that anyone who contributes anything does not part with that amount alone but actually authorizes thereby the authorities to confiscate ... all that he may possess'.<sup>44</sup> An appeal for funds went out in Britain in June 1932, signed by Laski, Bertrand Russell and others,<sup>45</sup> but by July the League had failed to raise any substantial funds in Britain and so the Malaviyas<sup>46</sup> and the industrialist Birla family took the risk of furnishing funds from India.<sup>47</sup> In accordance with the long-standing strategy largely to 'appear British' the India League had a preference for the delegation to consist of sitting Labour MPs or peers as they were the most suited to refuting the claims made by the Secretary of State and would be well placed to 'make a breach in public opinion'.<sup>48</sup> Owing to an emergency recall of Parliament no sitting MP was available and so the League settled on Menon himself, Ellen Wilkinson, Monica Whately and the left-wing journalist, Leonard Matters. Monica Whately was then Vice-President of the Labour candidates' association and Menon described her as a 'member of the British governing classes ... a very effective speaker and one of the foremost women in the militant suffragette struggle'.<sup>49</sup> It was Wilkinson, however, who represented the real coup for the delegation with Menon noting that she 'has the *entrée* into the press here and

<sup>43</sup> 'Memorandum: Meeting Held at the House of Commons', 28 Jun. 1932, NMM/KMP/187.

<sup>44</sup> Govind Malaviya to Menon, 9 May 1932, NMML/KMP/567.

<sup>45</sup> Indian Political Intelligence [hereafter IPI] to Nott-Bower, 12 Jul. 1932, BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/448.

<sup>46</sup> M. M. Malaviya to India League (Cable), 3 Jul. 1932, NMML/KMP/567.

<sup>47</sup> Unsigned (probably Menon or J. F. Horrabin) to Malaviya, 9 Jul. 1932, NMML/KMP/567.

<sup>48</sup> Menon to M. M. Malaviya, 23 Apr. 1932, NMML/KMP/567.

<sup>49</sup> Menon to M. M. Malaviya, 9 Jul. 1932, NMML/KMP/567.

in America. Personally, I think she is worth any three or four other people whom we might send.<sup>50</sup> Both the India Office and the Government of India feared the public and parliamentary reaction to the delegation's report, which was presumed to be hostile,<sup>51</sup> particularly in left-wing circles as they were aware of the delegation's prominence within the Labour party.<sup>52</sup> The India Office therefore wrote to the Government of India, outlining the agnotological strategy of preserving the 'biased balance': giving the delegation 'an opportunity of acquiring correct information and being animated by a broad official perspective'.<sup>53</sup>

### Violence and agnotology in the colonial state of exception

Examining the evidence the League collected in India permits a unique opportunity to investigate the nature of colonial violence by bringing it into conversation with critical theorisations of the lawless and exemplary state violence generated by the rule of colonial difference. Equally, the very act of anticolonial witnessing forced the empire into an active position of denial, laying bare its dependence on both exemplary violence and its simultaneous disavowal, achieved through the strategy of agnotological exceptioning: making an exception out of every demonstrable case of violence. As the India League delegation travelled through 12,000 miles of British India, visiting every province bar one, the Government of India was forced to admit the failure of their initial agnotological strategy of maintaining the 'official perspective'. The Madras Presidency even admitted that the delegation 'lived in an atmosphere of civil disobedience throughout their stay' and that 'the delegation were everywhere confronted with stories of police excesses'.<sup>54</sup> The delegation rejected the widespread claim that 'the police are conducting themselves with great restraint, that the measures are necessary to maintain law and order ... and that only minimum force required is used'.<sup>55</sup> They drew on the authority of 'medical certificates' which gave 'particulars of injuries of head, chest and limbs, of death resulting from police beatings, samples of which we have in our possession, [which] belie this "minimum force" argument'. They found 'that in several places hospitals which received government aid would not render medical assistance to the victims of police excesses'.<sup>56</sup>

The delegation found the colonial state of emergency in India to represent not the suspension of law, but rather its intensification into something they called 'lawless law'.<sup>57</sup> This anticipates Caroline Elkins's critical idea of 'legalised lawlessness'<sup>58</sup> or even what Nasser Hussain calls

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> William Peel to Maurice Hallet, 14 Aug. 1932, NAI/Home (Pol): 40/XII/1932.

<sup>52</sup> William Peel to Maurice Hallet, 5 Aug. 1932, NAI/Home (Pol): 40/XII/1932.

<sup>53</sup> 'Confidential Note' in Hallet to Stewart, 4 Jul. 1932, NAI/Home (Pol): 40/XII/1932.

<sup>54</sup> 'Copy of a note on the activities of the India League Delegation in the Madras Presidency' in Hallet to Clauson, 10 Aug. 1932, BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/448.

<sup>55</sup> IL, COI, 163.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>58</sup> Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (2022), 140.

'hyperlegality':<sup>59</sup> the position where a flurry of laws, ordinances, immunisations, tacit permissions and legalised exceptions culminates, as Deana Heath argues, in the legalised 'power to undertake whatever exceptional means are deemed necessary'.<sup>60</sup> In the absence of a global language of human rights, the delegation lamented how this produced the 'unlawful and according to British ideas, thoroughly unjustified way in which police are allowed to take the law into their own hands'<sup>61</sup> because they were not 'answerable before a court of law' as 'the Indian government indemnifies its police and officials in advance'.<sup>62</sup> The result was that un-British 'rule appears more arbitrary than even a martial law regime when police, military and district civil officers may shoot people dead or order firing and no inquiry is held after the incident'.<sup>63</sup> This matches the colonial 'man on the spot' to Judith Butler's description of 'petty sovereigns':<sup>64</sup> the dispersal of sovereign power over life and death into innumerable administrative figures which reduces those who are subordinated to them to what she calls a 'precarious life'. The delegation recorded numerous examples of the precarious life produced by the British in India. In Hashanabad 'the police opened fire, killing two and wounding many others. Three of the wounded died in hospital later'.<sup>65</sup> In Mamlatdar a female protestor recounted how, even though they 'made no resistance and were not violent ... they were struck from behind by the police as they were marched off'.<sup>66</sup> The delegation saw a 'procession soon surrounded by police constables. British sergeants then "charged" the Congress volunteers, which is the name apparently given to the merciless beating with *lathis* that we witnessed'.<sup>67</sup> Thus, the delegation witnessed the transformation of Indians by the British into a version of Agamben's *homo sacer*: a paradoxical creature so encased in colonial law as to be completely outside it.<sup>68</sup>

The India League found colonial violence to be brutally performative. In Bochestan, the delegation witnessed a procession which 'consisted mainly of women' being subject to 'the most savage beating ... Policemen swung their five-foot *lathis* with both hands and delivered blows on the heads and shoulders. It was a ruthless *performance* [my emphasis], savage in the fury with which the police delivered the blows'.<sup>69</sup> A local magistrate offered as a reason for the violence the need that 'others must be shown that they can't do this sort of thing'.<sup>70</sup> This was not confined to a single incident: the general argument was that the use of *lathis* was legitimate as a 'deterrence against the continuance of picketing'. To the delegation this was unacceptable as 'the use

<sup>59</sup> Nasser Hussain, 'Hyperlegality', *New Criminal Law Review*, 10 (2007), 514–31.

<sup>60</sup> Deana Heath, *Colonial Terror: Torture and State Violence in Colonial India*, (Oxford, 2021), 55.

<sup>61</sup> IL, COI, 168.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>64</sup> See Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004).

<sup>65</sup> IL, COI, 188.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>68</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago, 2005).

<sup>69</sup> IL, COI, 170.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

of force as a “deterrent” ... is contrary to all accepted notions of administering law.<sup>71</sup> Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias have argued that such performative spectacles of state violence were replaced over the nineteenth century by an instrumentalised violence that was minimised to what was needed to maintain the ‘disciplined society’<sup>72</sup> with this becoming an increasingly important component of the legitimisation of the state and its claims upon its citizens.<sup>73</sup> Liberal empires, on the other hand, justified themselves with the claim that they were holding down a natural propensity to internecine violence among their savage subjects. As John McGuire points out, however, in the case of Australia, public executions (a form of performative violence) were phased out in the nineteenth century, but an exception was made as they were *brought back* for the execution of native Australians, especially those accused of murdering a European and sometimes in front of a native audience that had been transported specially to witness the spectacle. This was because they were held to have a tutelary or deterrent effect on racially essentialised (and often criminalised) native populations.<sup>74</sup> Colonial state violence was therefore excessive<sup>75</sup> and exceeded that of other state formations, partly due to paranoia and a failure to establish legitimacy<sup>76</sup> but mostly because of Laski’s ‘ancient philosophy’, of the strong hand, which Kim Wagner has described as ‘the ... logic of [colonial] difference insisting that brute force was the only language natives understand’.<sup>77</sup> After General Dyer killed hundreds of unarmed Indian civilians in Amritsar in 1919, his defence provided the most infamous crystallisation of this logic: ‘I fired and continued to fire until the crowd dispersed, and I consider this the least amount of firing which could produce the necessary moral and widespread effect.’<sup>78</sup>

Giorgio Agamben has famously used the term ‘state of exception’<sup>79</sup> to theorise the coexistence of liberal democracy with instances of state repression and illiberal violence in the camp and elsewhere, which might appear to map

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>72</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process: State Formation and Civilisation* (Oxford, 1982), 238, and Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, ed. Alan Sheridan (1991).

<sup>73</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ, 2022), 17.

<sup>74</sup> See John McGuire, ‘Judicial Violence and the “Civilising process”: Race and the Transition from Public to Private Executions in Colonial Australia’, *Australian Historical Studies*, 29 (1998), 187–209.

<sup>75</sup> See Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (New York, 2022).

<sup>76</sup> Violence was cheaper than manufacturing consent through an expensive state apparatus, see Dierk Walter, *Colonial Violence: European Empires and their Use of Force* (2017), a consent that in any case was impossible to generate. See Ranajit Guha’s now-classic study, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA, 1997).

<sup>77</sup> Kim Wagner, ‘Savage Warfare: Violence and the Rule of Colonial Difference in Early British Counterinsurgency’, *History Workshop Journal*, 85 (2018), 231. See also Rudrangshu Mukherjee, ‘“Satan Let Loose Upon the Earth”: The Kanpur Massacres in India in the Revolt of 1857’, *Past and Present*, 128 (1990), 92–116.

<sup>78</sup> *Report on the Committee ... to investigate the Disturbances in the Punjab etc.* (HMSO. Cmd. 681. 1920), 1088.

<sup>79</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception*.

neatly on to wings of the Dual Policy. Stephen Morton has argued, however, that one of the limits of Agamben's theory is how it 'fails to consider ... how colonial sovereignty was experienced as a permanent state of emergency from the standpoint of the colonised'.<sup>80</sup> Achille Mbembe has described the European colony as 'the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended – the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of "civilization."<sup>81</sup> It is thanks to Mbembe, therefore, that we can understand how the 'constitutional wing' of the Dual Policy provided the cover of legitimate, reforming liberal governance that justified the violence repression of 'illegitimate' civil disobedience. Colonial violence, in turn, could be presented as a necessary state of exception to the latter, permitting it to pose as the norm of empire.

The question remains whether the Dual Policy was itself a state of exception to actual colonial rule, or an intensification of normal practices. My view is that it is concentric: a state of exception within the state of exception that was colonial rule itself. To contemporaries, as Morton suggests, it would have depended on the vantage point. For the colonised it was business as usual, if more brutal, but to the coloniser the violence of the Dual policy was necessarily an exception to their benevolent, civilising, liberal imperial rule. Amritsar, again, provides a good example of this: after the massacre produced extensive outrage, Winston Churchill attempted to contain it by arguing that it was 'an extraordinary event, a monstrous event, an event which stands in singular and sinister isolation'.<sup>82</sup> Purnima Bose calls this the 'rogue-colonial individualism' argument where a 'specific person is scapegoated ... through the censure of the most egregious offenders of colonial brutality such as General Dyer, the authoritarian nature of colonial rule is obscured by the trappings of ... democracy'.<sup>83</sup> Such agnotological disavowal through exceptioning leaves the practice of performative colonial state violence largely intact: Nasser Hussain notes how the Hunter Commission (convened to investigate the Amritsar massacre) found the 'object of performative violence' to be 'everywhere disavowed' and yet 'foundational'.<sup>84</sup> Against this denial, not to mention the long-standing tendency of imperial historiography to remain silent on the issue of colonial violence,<sup>85</sup> the Amritsar massacre has now attracted a

<sup>80</sup> Stephen Morton, 'Reading Kenya's Colonial State of Emergency after Agamben', in *Agamben and Colonialism*, ed. Simone Bignall and Marcelo Svirsky (Edinburgh, 2012), 112.

<sup>81</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham, NC, 2003), 23.

<sup>82</sup> HC Deb, vol. 131, col. 1825, 8 Jul. 1920, *Hansard*.

<sup>83</sup> Purnima Bose, *Organizing Empire: Individualism, Collective Agency, and India* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003), 31.

<sup>84</sup> Nasser Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonialism and the Rule of Law* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2003), 131.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Drayton, 'Where Does the World Historian Write From? Objectivity, Moral Conscience and the Past and Present of Imperialism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46 (2011), 671–85. The silence is now shattered. See e.g. Jordanna Bailikin, 'The Boot and the Spleen: When Was Murder Possible in British India?', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 48 (2006), 462–93; Caroline Elkins, *A History of the British Empire* (New York, 2022); Deana Heath, *Colonial Terror: Torture and State Violence in Colonial India* (Oxford, 2021); Elizabeth Kolsky, *Colonial Justice in British*

productive density of scholarship pointing to the ways in which Amritsar was *not* the exception to the modalities of British colonial state violence in India,<sup>86</sup> as was pretended at the time – and which the *Condition of India* reveals to be a deliberate agnotological strategy.

Anticolonial witnessing reveals the paradox of colonial state violence: that, according to its own terms, in order to successfully uphold colonialism it must be exemplary while remaining an exception, making it reliant on agnotological exceptioning. The India League, like the Hunter Commission, found violence and its disavowal to be foundational to British rule in India. The *Condition of India* includes a quote by Dewan Bahadur H. Sarda, a retired judge and member of the Legislative Assembly who had moved away from a position of collaboration with the Government of India to one of opposition: ‘I fail to find out under what law a man who sits on the side of the road can be assaulted with a *lathi* or fired at. Arrest and imprison him. There is now nothing but the rule of *lathis* in the land.’<sup>87</sup> The problem for a colonial state whose governmentality has been reduced to the performative violence of the *lathi raj* was, as Taylor Sherman puts it, that ‘by using punishments for essentially spectacular purposes, governments in India helped transform penal practice into political spectacle’ which could backfire as ‘these acts of violence became battlegrounds for representation’.<sup>88</sup> The India League, like Congress, was fighting on this discursive battleground but also perceived the agnotological strategy of its enemy, the colonial state. This was ‘a conspiracy of silence and wilful ignorance on the part of officials’<sup>89</sup> demonstrated by the ‘instructions given [by the Government of India] ... that we were not to see beatings; that we were not allowed to see beatings. But we did see *lathi* beating – when boys were beaten into unconsciousness. We had those boys carried into our bungalow; we tended them’.<sup>90</sup> The delegation soon noticed that police behaviour changed when they knew the delegation was there: they were only able to witness the Bochestan violence by arriving ‘before daybreak’ so that the ‘police did not know we were in the place; we were well hidden by the parapet wall’. In Calicut, the delegation witnessed the police ‘raining a show of *lathi* blows on the volunteers’; however, after the police noticed the members of the delegation ‘we saw no more beating’.<sup>91</sup>

The contradictions produced by the reliance of the colonial state on both exemplary violence and its disavowal could produce bizarre unrealities. In

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*India* (Cambridge, 2010); John Newsinger, *The Blood Never Dried: A People's History of the British Empire* (2006).

<sup>86</sup> See e.g. Helen Fine, *Imperial Crime and Punishment: The Massacre at Jallianwala Bagh and British Judgment, 1919–1920* (Honolulu, 1977) and Kim Wagner, *Amritsar 1919: An Empire of Fear and the Making of a Massacre* (New Haven, NJ, 2019).

<sup>87</sup> IL, COI, 177.

<sup>88</sup> Sherman, *State Violence*, 6–7.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Report on the private meeting arranged to welcome the India League Delegation’, 26 Nov. 1932, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>90</sup> Monica Whately, ‘What We Saw in India’, *New Clarion*, 14 Jan. 1933.

<sup>91</sup> IL, COI, 170.

Mardan, in the militarised North-West Frontier Province, the delegation witnessed a meeting being violently broken by up police who were

belabouring them violently with their full-sized *lathis* and hitting men with rifle butts. A number were savagely beaten with the *lathis* swung against their head and bodies. An old man ... had his turban snatched, his hands tied up with it and his subjected to a rain of *lathi* blows ... We noticed that the pounding on the chest has removed thick layers of skin and tissue ... It was a *display* [my emphasis] of wanton and savage force on people who had done no harm, committed no offence or violence, and were not assembled for any unlawful purpose.<sup>92</sup>

This continued, in Ellen Wilkinson's words, until 'suddenly an Indian in mufti arrived on a bicycle. There was a sharp order. The police formed into twoes [sic] and marched away ... I couldn't understand why.'<sup>93</sup> Despite what they had seen, 'the authorities denied for some little time, even the next day, that there were any police in the area at all'.<sup>94</sup> An official later complained to the delegation that 'I do not think you have treated us fairly. If you had told us where you were going, we should have given the strictest instructions that no beating was to take place while you were there' while another admitted that 'As soon as we knew you were there, word was sent to withdraw the police.'<sup>95</sup> The Police Superintendent was most concerned about the delegation not writing to the papers in Britain about it.<sup>96</sup>

The broader official view, communicated to London, was that 'it is a matter for gratification that worse did not occur' and the colonial police were to be forgiven because

the task of maintaining law and order in a vast subcontinent containing 350 million people, the vast majority of which are ignorant and illiterate is one of extreme difficulty...it must, in view of the inadequacy of the police force, and the strain and provocation to which its members have so long been exposed inevitably from *time to time be punctuated by unfortunate incidents* [my emphasis].<sup>97</sup>

This was a clear demonstration of agnotological exceptioning and how it was tightly braided with the 'ancient philosophy' of the strong hand. The 'unfortunate incidents' were the exception made necessary by native deficiency – the ignorance and illiteracy of Indians (after more than a hundred years of British rule) and not colonialism itself. Other evasive strategies were used,

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

<sup>93</sup> Ellen Wilkinson, 'India League Delegation's Visit to India: Miss Wilkinson's trenchant reply to Sir S. Hoare', *The Tribune*, 28 Dec. 1932.

<sup>94</sup> IL, COI, 425.

<sup>95</sup> *The Tribune*, 28 Dec. 1932, and IL, COI, 425.

<sup>96</sup> IL, COI, 425.

<sup>97</sup> 'Report on the India League delegation' (n.d., probably Nov. 1932), BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

including the blaming of the victims: 'if any member of the assembly was roughly handled, he had only himself to blame for disobeying police orders'.<sup>98</sup>

The delegation also found, to their surprise, that *they* were 'in the position of being held responsible for the police having run amok'. They also felt that 'generally the answer to everything is "this is the Frontier."' <sup>99</sup> Officials justified their actions to each other by arguing that the 'necessity for prompt action when crowds of Pathans become unruly requires no emphasis'.<sup>100</sup> Elizabeth Kolsky shows how the Frontier and the Pathans who lived there were particular victims of the colonial practice of establishing durable states of exception where colonial punishment was made, not by the universal criteria of juridically demonstrable 'guilt' or 'innocence' but by the rule of colonial difference: racialised fantasies of the essential savagery or fanaticism of certain social collectives. In these cases, different legal orders (exceptions) enabled a greater degree of colonial state violence underpinned by a reduced accountability, which was held to be necessary because of the alleged propensity to violence of the *colonised*.<sup>101</sup> Thus, the necessity for excessive, exemplary violence in the Mardan case is derived not just from the nature of colonialism, nor even the particular policing methods of the ordinances and the frontier, but is split between a contingent (and false) claim of unruliness and the enduring rule of colonial difference. By being beaten in the street the process of arrest, trial and punishment is compressed into a single gesture, where exemplary punishment is rendered necessary by the invariant fact of a Pathan being a Pathan. To the coloniser, this was a necessary exception produced by this fact, but from the victim's perspective, the colonial state of exception is permanent because it is generated by an identity that he can neither escape nor change.

Officials struggled, however, to make this argument to the delegation who had, after all, seen the violence happen unprovoked. Instead, officials offered the implausible explanation that 'the police, whom we saw, were probably not police but Red Shirts [members of the *Khudai Khidmatgar*, a Congress-allied anticolonial movement composed principally of Pathans] dressed in police uniform!' The claim was that they had beaten themselves in order to 'to stage an atrocity'.<sup>102</sup> This mirrored an earlier argument made to the delegation by a Circle Inspector in Siddapur, which held that police violence against women was exaggerated, as shown by a case of where 'one women had beaten all her arrested companions in order to make out that the police beat women'.<sup>103</sup> The delegation predicted that the patently ridiculous Mardan 'police ballet' would die 'a natural death',<sup>104</sup> but it was debated in the provincial legislative

<sup>98</sup> 'Copy of a Demi-Official No. 1720 15.1.1932' from Government of North West Frontier Province to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 15 Nov. 1932, BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/448.

<sup>99</sup> IL, COI, 424.

<sup>100</sup> I. M. Stephens, 'Note on the India League Delegation', n.d. BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>101</sup> Elizabeth Kolsky, 'The Colonial Rule of Law and the Legal Regime of Exception: Frontier "Fanaticism" and State Violence in British India', *The American Historical Review*, 120 (2015), 1218–46.

<sup>102</sup> *The Tribune*, 28. Dec. 1932.

<sup>103</sup> IL, COI, 197.

<sup>104</sup> *The Tribune*, 28 Dec. 1932.

assembly and endorsed by senior officials at the India Office in London<sup>105</sup> and eventually the Secretary of State for India.<sup>106</sup> Thus, under critical pressure, a fantasy was generated by the interaction of the two converging wings of colonial exceptioning. The first was the generation of exemplary colonial violence by concentric states of exception (colonial rule, the ordinances, the frontier, the Pathan) that telescope away from the vision of liberal imperialism performed by the constitutional process in Britain, and which arises from the rule of colonial difference premised on racially essentialised native deficiencies. The second was the disavowal of colonial violence by the permanent insistence that it is always the necessary *exception* to an illusory civilised norm, and this makes the ‘Pathan who beats himself’ an obligatory hallucination when these claims break down under the pressure of anticolonial witnessing and a useful example of the deep integration of agnotology into the core biopolitics of the late British empire.

### The agnotological empire strikes back

Upon its return to Britain, the members of the delegation declared that ‘the Round Table Conference is an attempt to delude England’.<sup>107</sup> The agnotological bureaucracies of the British empire now swung into action to preserve that delusion. The India Office was aware that what they were spreading was ignorance because they acknowledged the truth of what the India League recorded, thus fulfilling the key criteria of agnotology: the *deliberate* spreading of ignorance. An official conceded privately that the delegation’s account in Mardan, for example, ‘had to be taken as truthful, despite diverging from the account of the local police’.<sup>108</sup> In a letter to a concerned Major Graham Pole (oddly, a former India League member), the private secretary to the Secretary of State for India accused Monica Whately’s account of prison conditions as being ‘imaginative’ while his private handwritten note admitted that ‘there is no reason to suppose that such facts as are stated by Miss Whately ... are not substantially correct’.<sup>109</sup> More broadly, there were admissions from the highest levels of the Government of India that the delegation did see systemic police brutality.<sup>110</sup>

Officials held that since ‘it is unlikely that individual allegations will always or often be able to be met with flat and effective replies, the chief desideratum is to discredit the members of the delegation and their claims to reliability’.<sup>111</sup> Since they were mostly British and had the ‘strong position of eye-witnesses’ the strategy was to argue that their tour was ‘conducted’ by Congress. There were, however, ‘heated denials by the Congress press that the Congress has

<sup>105</sup> Hallet to Peel, 14 Nov. 1932, BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/448.

<sup>106</sup> *The Tribune*, 28 Dec. 1932.

<sup>107</sup> ‘Private Report of India League Conference held 26.11.1932’, 27 Nov. 1932, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>108</sup> Matt Perry, *‘Red Ellen’ Wilkinson: Her Ideas, Movements and World* (Manchester, 2014), 232.

<sup>109</sup> WD Croft to Graham Pole, 6 Feb. 1933, BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/449.

<sup>110</sup> ‘India League “Labour Delegation” to India’ (Secret Minute Paper), 16 Oct. 1932, BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/448.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

nothing to do with these visitors<sup>112</sup> and a Congress bulletin had proclaimed its 'creed, that India must and will free herself by her own unaided efforts' and therefore to 'rely on the help of British socialists' was 'criminal stupidity'.<sup>113</sup> A different bulletin noted, however, that there were British people who were not satisfied with official sources, including the Labour party which might 'harbour some useful doubts'.<sup>114</sup> Chakravarty Rajagopalachari, the leader of the Madras Presidency Congress party, helped organise the southern leg of the delegation's tour in the hope that its members would be able to 'fight the intoxicated [Conservative] majority in the House'.<sup>115</sup> The banned All-India Congress Committee instructed provincial committees to show the delegation 'confiscated buildings, looted houses, and other marks of police atrocities'. Care was to be taken to 'avoid all exaggerations' and to 'bring only thoroughly reliable witnesses before it'.<sup>116</sup> A provincial committee believed that 'it would be effective if Congress activities such as processions, picketing, etc. dispersed by *lathis* could be arranged during their stay and witnessed by them'.<sup>117</sup> Papers seized from the Congress socialist Jayaprakash Narayan showed that he was involved in 'preparing the ground' for the delegation, a sign of the 'lively interest displayed by Congress in the delegation's activities'.<sup>118</sup>

This is unsurprising: Amritsar had 'hastened the process of Gandhi's alienation from the British *Raj*'.<sup>119</sup> While Gandhi promoted his own non-violent politics for its intrinsic spiritual value, when international news recorded examples of violent police attacks on his followers the British could be profoundly discomfited. Congress knew this and often contested official explanations of police violence,<sup>120</sup> while 'literally thousands of accounts of police violence were produced, not only in newspapers, but in vernacular poetry and proscribed pamphlets'.<sup>121</sup> The delegation, therefore, was only successful thanks to the initial funding and cooperation of Congress members in the joint project of demonstrating the violence of empire. This was a double-edged sword, however: Congress would not have pursued this strategy if it was not guaranteed to lead to a violent police response (moral responsibility therefore lies with the colonial state) and the campaign did provide the India League with an accurate impression of colonial police violence. The British government, however, was now able to argue that Congress was responsible for the violence as it had

<sup>112</sup> 'Extract from weekly report of the Director, Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India' [hereafter DIB/EWR] 24 Aug. 1932, BL/IOR/L/P&j/12/448.

<sup>113</sup> Maurice Hallet, 'Note on the India League Delegation', 11 Oct. 1932, NAI/Home (Pol) 40/XII/1932.

<sup>114</sup> 'The Congress Bulletin', 13 Aug. 1932, NAI/Home (Pol) 40/XII/1932.

<sup>115</sup> P.A. Kelly to C.B.S. Clea, 18 Jul. 1932, NAI/Home (Pol) 40/XII/1932.

<sup>116</sup> DIB/EWR 25.8.32 BL/IOR/L/P&j/12/448.

<sup>117</sup> 'Memorandum on the India League Delegation', n.d., BL/IOR/L/1/1/50 and DIB/EWR, 8 Sept. 1932 BL/IOR/L/P&j/12/448.

<sup>118</sup> DIB/EWR 8.9.1932, BL/IOR/L/P&j/12/448.

<sup>119</sup> BR Nanda *Gandhi and his Critics* (Oxford, 1994), 34.

<sup>120</sup> Vinay Lal, 'Committees of Inquiry and Discourses of "Law and Order" in Twentieth-Century British India' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1991).

<sup>121</sup> Sherman, *State Violence*, 63.

'made strenuous endeavours to organise lawless demonstrations and acts of defiance to authority calculated to bring the populace into conflict with the police'.<sup>122</sup> On the basis of these arguments, the India Office drew up a memorandum containing 'reserve ammunition'<sup>123</sup> to refute India League claims and answer questions in Parliament by putting out 'suitable material based on the information we have supplied to show the extent to which the members of the delegation from the outset of their tour have allowed themselves to be run and influenced by Congress'.<sup>124</sup>

While in India, a member of the delegation had complained to an audience that:

If any of us stand up in Parliament to speak on India, some Major or Captain or some such person who has just returned from India snubs us down by asking what we know of India. To this the die-hards will cheer, we have to sit-down quietly ... Where is democracy even in England?<sup>125</sup>

Upon their return, they realised their visit had failed to rectify the biased balance that privileged the official version. From the Treasury benches Hoare accused the delegation of 'not being disposed to credit accurate information when it was supplied to them' by officials as they preferred to take 'impressions from Congress workers who are known to have received for the purpose careful instructions from their headquarters as to staging for their benefit Congress demonstrations which would involve clashes with the police'. A Conservative MP even raised the alarm about 'a series of public meetings to disseminate this inaccurate information ... with the support of the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition and other prominent Members of the Opposition Front Bench'. A Labour MP (who was also an active India League member) asked in response whether 'any information obtained other than through official Government sources is necessarily inaccurate?' Hoare ignored him and harped on how 'the India League received a substantial donation from a prominent Indian Congress leader about the time that the mission was being arranged'. He also appealed to Conservative MPs to explain 'the real state of affairs to the country'<sup>126</sup> and claimed that 'we have had a large body of evidence taken from Congress sources showing that, from the very start, Congress made its business to stage-manage the kind of picture which they wished the delegation to see'.<sup>127</sup> Hoare was citing an intercepted 'letter from Congress headquarters', which he refused to lay upon the table of the House. Lansbury appealed to the chair to intervene against a violation of

<sup>122</sup> I. M. Stephens, 'Note on the India League Delegation', n.d., BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>123</sup> MacGregor to Stephens, 29 Dec. 1932, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>124</sup> I. M. Stephens to H. Macgregor, 24 Oct. 1932, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50 and A. H. Ahmed to Bamford, 5 Oct. 1932, NAI/Home(Pol) 50/XII/1932.

<sup>125</sup> DIB/EWR 6.8.1932, BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/448.

<sup>126</sup> HC Deb, vol. 272, col. 455, 28 Nov. 1932, *Hansard*.

<sup>127</sup> HC Deb, vol. 273, col. 1259, 22 Dec. 1932, *Hansard*.

parliamentary procedure, but the Speaker ruled against him and the debate was ended.

Thus, the agnotological empire maps onto a formal weakness of British parliamentary democracy. This was even more pronounced in the pretend democracy of British India. In response to questions in the Legislative Assembly of the North-West Frontier Province, an official member said that an inquiry was made (by the accused police officer himself) and no violence took place, even though privately the Government of the North-West Frontier had admitted that the incident ‘must be accepted as true’.<sup>128</sup> The text of the inquiry was confidential and could therefore not be tabled. An Indian Member then asked whether the Pathans ‘appeared in Police uniform and that they themselves used *lathis* against their own brethren’. The Honourable Mr. C. H. Gidney felt ‘unable to answer his question’. The President of the Legislative Assembly then accused the Indian member of entering into ‘arguments’, which was against ‘procedure, Standing Order and Parliamentary Rule’.<sup>129</sup> The agnotological empire imposed itself in India in other, more direct ways. Directly after the incident in Mardan, the town had ‘been blockaded and people had been beaten and forbidden to leave their homes. They were told they were not to go see the “Committee” [the delegation]. People had been chased, their hands tied with their turbans, and beaten.’<sup>130</sup>

Soon after the India League’s return to Britain, the British branch of the European Association of India wrote to the India Office demanding that something be done ‘to stop dissemination by the India League of scurrilous lies about India’.<sup>131</sup> They were assured that, while there was nothing to be done ‘to prevent the distribution of such bulletins in this country [Britain] ... everything possible is being done to dry up the source of supply’.<sup>132</sup> To this end, one S. Venkatapahtaiya, an lawyer from Bangalore, was arrested ‘for furthering the activities of the Carnatic Congress party’ by bringing ‘Leonard Matters, A European, to show him the manner in which the Congress activities were carried out’,<sup>133</sup> while a barrister, Bisheswar Prasad Sinha, was arrested for supplying information to the League in London. IPI concluded that ‘The efforts of the authorities to intercept it [material from India to the League] must be proving very successful, to judge by the complaints of both the India League and its ally the Friends of India Society “that it is exceedingly difficult to obtain direct news from India”’.<sup>134</sup>

By December the India Office could assure the Government of India that ‘with regard to the India League delegation, the whole affair has gone flop

<sup>128</sup> Government of the North West Frontier Province to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 15 Nov. 1932, BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/448.

<sup>129</sup> ‘Proceedings of the North West Frontier Province Legislative Assembly, Questions and Answers Session’, 9 Mar. 1933, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>130</sup> IL, COI, 418.

<sup>131</sup> H.B. Holmes to H. MacGregor, 15 Feb. 1933, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>132</sup> IPI to MacGregor, 18 Feb. 1933, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>133</sup> IPI to Peel, 6 Jan. 1933, BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/449.

<sup>134</sup> IPI to Clauson, 18 Feb. 1933, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

in the British daily press ... But meanwhile I am afraid that in some quarters perspective has been lost and we have got into touch with certain political organisations to arrange counter propaganda.<sup>135</sup> A secret report on the India League, based on surveillance and the intercepted letters of former Labour MPs (though care was taken to disguise this), was shared with Conservative Central Office and the Anti-Socialist Union,<sup>136</sup> which overlapped with the British Union of Fascists and had a committee member connected to Joachim von Ribbentrop.<sup>137</sup> The India Office also sought to drive a wedge between Wilkinson and Labour on the one hand, and the delegation on the other.<sup>138</sup>

In its British campaign against the *Condition of India*, the India Office adopted a clear strategy of agnotological exceptioning, or in its own words of 'ignoring the general and investigating the particular'.<sup>139</sup> To take an example, the India Office managed to obtain an advance proof copy of the *Condition of India* from E. W. Davis, the Secretary of the Newspaper Association. The India Office told Davis that 'this is a publication which no responsible Englishman should be associated' with and that:

the government would deplore the publication of such a book at any time and especially at a time when conditions in India have greatly improved, and English statesmen are employed in the task of securing the constitutional advance of India on the most reasonable line ... Abroad the book must do incalculable harm by suggesting an absolutely false picture of British rule ... Its method is the translation to England of the Indian Congress use of exaggeration, misrepresentation and the suggestion of the exceptional as representing the general [my emphasis].<sup>140</sup>

These views were conveyed to J. S. King, who represented the publisher Jonathan Cape,<sup>141</sup> along with threats of 'probable libel action'.<sup>142</sup> The India Office was able to report to India with glee 'our endeavours to keep the book out of the hands of reputable publishers. In this we succeeded, but the control of publishers other than reputable is beyond us'.<sup>143</sup> Despite the India Office's best efforts and the near-bankruptcy of the obscure publisher the League eventually secured, dozens of copies of the *Condition of India* were

<sup>135</sup> H. MacGregor to I. M. Stephens, 1 Dec. 1932, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>136</sup> 'H.A.R.' to M. Seton and 'Rab' Butler, 29 Nov. 1932, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>137</sup> Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers on the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933-9* (Oxford, 1983), 225.

<sup>138</sup> 'H.A.R.' to MacGregor, 26 Nov. 1932, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>139</sup> W. D. Croft to Graham Pole, 6 Feb. 1933, BL/IOR/ L/P&J/12/449.

<sup>140</sup> H. MacGregor to E. W. Davies, Secretary of the Newspaper Society, 18 Aug. 1933, BL/IOR/ L/P&J/12/449.

<sup>141</sup> E. W. Davies, General Secretary, Newspaper Society to Hugh MacGregor, 19 Oct. 1933, BL/IOR/ L/P&J/12/449.

<sup>142</sup> MacGregor to Peel, 18 Oct. 1932, BL/IOR/ L/P&J/12/449.

<sup>143</sup> MacGregor to I. M. Stephens, 2 May 1934, BL/IOR/ L/P&J/12/449.

ordered,<sup>144</sup> including from the Labour Party Research Department, the No More War group, Foyles, Essex Hall bookshop, the Socialist Bookshop, W. H. Smith, the National Christian Council of India, the 'Diwan bookshop of Jerusalem and others'.<sup>145</sup> Some 200 copies were dispatched to the United States, attracting the attention of the editor of the New York-based magazine *Asia*, who was interested in Bertrand Russell (who had written the preface) writing for them. The India Office told the British Library of Information in New York that the book was 'altogether a poisonous publication'<sup>146</sup> and requested that crucial node of British imperialist propaganda to prepare the usual 'counterblasts'.<sup>147</sup> There was real official fear over the book's 'considerable sale in India' and that it was therefore 'clearly liable to proscription under Section 99-A of the Criminal procedure code'.<sup>148</sup> The Government of India noted that there might be objections 'on grounds of European liberalism [to] the proscription of the India League Delegation's Report' but held that this was a 'theoretical rather than a practical objection, under Indian conditions'<sup>149</sup> and so the book was prohibited under the Sea Customs Act.<sup>150</sup>

While the India Office could not ban the book in Britain, the British press was more than delighted to discredit the India League, defer to officialdom and protect the biased balance. After the India Office wrote to the Foreign Editor of the *Daily Mail*, urging him to 'recognise that the India League is merely a tool used by the Gandhi Crowd',<sup>151</sup> the chummy reply was that the proscription of *The Condition of India* in India was 'the best thing that could happen to that pestiferous lot'.<sup>152</sup> The India Office had always been planning for the *Times* and 'one or two of the more liberal-minded papers' to receive from the Delhi Intelligence Bureau messages 'commenting on the visit and impressing the fact that most unfortunately the sources of information tapped by the delegation were very untrustworthy'.<sup>153</sup> Their success in delaying the publication of the *Condition of India* changed the strategy, however, and they began to prefer it if the press ignored the book, but apparently the editor of *The Times* 'did not wish the opportunity of criticising the tactics of the delegation to slip by'.<sup>154</sup> *The Times* review argued that it 'serves to emphasize the diverse views that might be taken of the Indian problem. No doubt a delegation of the India Defence League [an organisation that had helped organise the Tory revolt against the 1935 Act] could proceed to India and produce a report exactly

<sup>144</sup> Jonathan Griffin to Menon, 5 Feb. 1935, NMML/KMP/241.

<sup>145</sup> See NMML/KMP/241.

<sup>146</sup> MacGregor to Fletcher, 24 Aug. 1934, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>147</sup> IPI to Johnston, 21 Sept. 1934, BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/449.

<sup>148</sup> Home Department to Secretary of State for India, 25 Mar. 1934, BL/IOR/P&J/12/449.

<sup>149</sup> Director, Public Information, Home Department, Government of India to Desmond Young, 11 Apr. 1934, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>150</sup> 'Index to Statements of Prohibitions etc. prohibited from entering under Section 19 of the Indian Sea Customs', 10 Sept. 1932, BL/IOR/L/P&J/12/23.

<sup>151</sup> H. MacGregor to Douglas Crawford, 31 Mar. 1934, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>152</sup> Douglas Crawford to H. MacGregor, 2 Apr. 1934, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>153</sup> 'India Office Information Office Secret Minute Paper', 16 Oct. 1932, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>154</sup> A. H. Joyce to I. M. Stephens, 12 Mar. 1934, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

contrary to this.' It was also impossible to produce definitive information about the British empire in India, because any facts could *always* be the exception; in such a vast country it was easy to 'secure material that will support a given view; it does not necessarily follow that the view is of the people as a whole'. *The Times* also preserved the rule of colonial difference and recycled the racist official argument (producing an echo of the Pathan who must be beaten for being a Pathan) when it reminded its readership that 'in dealing with police methods some cognizance must be taken of the psychology of Oriental peoples'. None of this, however, amounted to evidence that the government was 'coercing nationalism' because this was being legitimately expressed at the Round Table Conferences in London where the real obstacle was Gandhi's refusal to recognise the 'realities inherent in the constitutionalist controversy'.<sup>155</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* admitted that 'things have been done under the Ordinances which Britain might well wish to forget and of them this catalogue is a formidable indictment'. Moreover, 'many of the cases of oppression and police terrorism can be amply checked from other sources'. Despite the value of its 'amassing of evidence' the problem was that the *Condition of India* had some 'frequently prejudiced generalisations'.<sup>156</sup> In this further echoing of the official argument being presented as journalistic comment, we find the most illogical agnotological exceptioning: that the verifiable evidence catalogued by the delegation was still somehow the exception to the civilised nature of the British empire.

The India Office duly noted the preservation of the biased balance: 'The English press had not fully lost its perspective and patriotism and the English public has not lost its sanity.'<sup>157</sup> It might have succeeded in controlling the press narrative and damaging the publication prospects of the *Condition of India* but they were not all powerful: the delegation received considerable coverage in India<sup>158</sup> and its members authored a few articles in the British left-wing press.<sup>159</sup> These had a small circulation and there is no evidence that the delegation had a demonstrable impact on public opinion outside the political left, however. There, the real triumph came at the Labour Party Conference of 1933. In a Conference that was much exercised by the horrors of dictatorship and fascism Monica Whately stated that 'In India to-day, under the British flag, there is a form of dictatorship that is comparable to the dictatorship of Hitler at the present time.' She compared Indian prisons to German concentration camps and argued that 'the Labour Party, as a great working-class movement, had great work to do with regard to Italy and Germany, but more directly for India, because it came under our own Government'. The Conference passed a composite resolution moved by India League leader Reginald Sorensen that pledged the party to a 'policy of self-

<sup>155</sup> *The Times*, 10 Mar. 1934.

<sup>156</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 17 Apr. 1934.

<sup>157</sup> MacGregor to Stephens, 18 Feb. 1933, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

<sup>158</sup> BL/IOR/L/1/1/50 has extracts from the Indian press.

<sup>159</sup> Monica Whately, 'What We Saw in India', *New Clarion*, 14 Jan. 1933 and Ellen Wilkinson, 'India League Delegation's Visit to India: Miss Wilkinson's Trenchant Reply to Sir S. Hoare', *The Tribune*, 28 Dec. 1932.

determination and self-government for India'.<sup>160</sup> While the immediate impact of the book eventually petered out, the theme of colonial violence did not. At a 1941 India League meeting, a British speaker held that while 'Amritsar was now a symbol representing a decisive step in the Independence movement' what was 'of more importance today were the "little Amritsars" which were constantly occurring'. The other speakers at the meeting confirmed that Dyer 'was merely one of others, that he was the natural product of the imperialist system, and that his mentality was not a strange phenomenon'.<sup>161</sup> Denunciation of colonial violence continued at increasingly large public meetings,<sup>162</sup> the Trades Union Congress,<sup>163</sup> and especially the 1944 Labour Party Conference where Trades Union leaders allied to the India League denounced the violence of British rule and successfully passed a resolution calling for immediate and unconditional Indian independence.<sup>164</sup>

## Conclusion

The objectives of the delegation show how the League remained committed to those two assumptions first outlined by Annie Besant: that British rule in India was un-British and that this was obscured from view in Britain. In pursuing the resulting strategy of anticolonial knowledge-making about empire, the India League competed with imperial agnotology that operated in Britain as much as in India, and part of the competition was not over fact or phenomenon but whether that fact or phenomenon was an exception to the general character of liberal imperialism. The *Condition of India* episode, and the ways in which it illuminates the operation of secrecy and surveillance in Britain in defence of empire, is also a demonstration of how the colonial state of exception could rebound into the metropole in complex ways that depended upon, revealed and constituted limits to British liberalism. This included the limits on the power of MPs in questioning the government and the existence of IPI, the principal organ of a secret imperial state, given free rein to overstep liberal boundaries of constitutionality by intercepting the correspondence of Labour party members and so helping the India Office to tip the scales of parliamentary debates and collaborate with the illiberal right wing and an ostensibly independent press. This provides a concrete example of Aimé Césaire's instinct that there were 'boomerang effects'<sup>165</sup> of imperialism, even within robustly liberal Britain. Thus, while the false promise of British imperialism was to make India more 'civilised' like Britain, when challenged by the India League with the opposite truth of colonialism, the organs of the imperial state made Britain, in certain small ways, more like the *Raj*.

<sup>160</sup> Labour Party, *Report of Annual Conference* (1933).

<sup>161</sup> IPI to Silver, 17 Apr. 1941, BL/IOR/L/P&J/618.

<sup>162</sup> See e.g. Report by India-Burma Association on the India League Demonstration at the London Coliseum, 13 Jan. 1943, BL/IOR/L/1/723.

<sup>163</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report of the Proceedings of the 75th Annual Trades Union Congress 6th–10th September 1943* (1943).

<sup>164</sup> Labour Party, *Record of Annual Conference* (1944).

<sup>165</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York, 2000), 3. 6

The *Condition of India* provides valuable support for Caroline Elkins, Deana Heath, Kim Wagner, Taylor Sherman and other historians who argue for the frequency and intensity of British colonial violence.<sup>166</sup> Equally, the evasions the delegation witnessed, and the repression of its findings, reveal the increasingly important role of agnotology in shielding this colonial violence and allowing it to continue, thus preserving liberal imperialism from collapsing into its own contradictions. The book also speaks to our contemporary politics of memory, something the India Office feared. In 1932 an official noted that:

the repercussions of this egregious publication have, so far, been few, in that it is not according to the spirit of the times, but the wheel of events might turn to circumstances more favourable and it is from the point of view of the future rather than the present that I am inclined to regard the publication with some concern.<sup>167</sup>

The official concession that the *Condition of India* contained anticolonial knowledge that was true but somehow un-knowable at the time, but might become intelligible in the future, invites those of us who live in that very future to ask whether Amritsar, ordinances, police firing, aerial policing and *lathi* charges are remembered by the British people as examples of, or exceptions to, the history of their empire. If the latter, does that mean, despite the overthrow of empire, that imperial agnotology has triumphed over anticolonialism as post-imperial forgetting? If we are properly to decolonise our memory of empire, therefore, we need to be attentive to both the lessons of anticolonial knowledge-making and the lingering effects of agnotological imperialism.

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<sup>166</sup> Elkins, *Legacy of Violence*; Heath, *Colonial Terror*; Wagner, *Amritsar 1919*; Sherman, *State Violence*.

<sup>167</sup> MacGregor to Stephens, 2 May 1934, BL/IOR/L/1/1/50.

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