"We are no visionaries and utopian dreamers" - Fragments and Reflections Regarding the League Against Imperialism

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(Work in progress - Please do not quote!)

The purpose with this text is to discuss and analyse facts connected to the organization League Against Imperialism (LAI) and its network, but also to reflect on the limitation on the subject of interest here, and to elaborate on definitions important and relevant for the study. Another issue of interest here is to present the source material and its character, and finally, to discuss what the documents, filed in the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History archive (RGASPI) in Moscow, reveal. Many of the issues mentioned here must be perceived as thoughts “put down on paper”, and not to be seen as definite versions or interpretations, since the analysis, at this stage, are undergoing a constant process. The text can also be seen as a way of coming to terms with the League, what its purpose was, and how it functioned.

I. “We are no Visionaries and Utopian Dreamers” – Explanation and Interpretation

The title is a quote taken from Willi Münzenberg’s speech on the opening day of the first Congress against Colonial Oppression on the 10\textsuperscript{th} of February 1927 in Brussels.\textsuperscript{1} The major motive for choosing this, as the title is that puts attention on the major problem at stake here, that is to say, the ideological contradiction that emerged in the League during its existence. Why did Münzenberg argue that the League Against Imperialism ought not to consist of “visionaries” and “utopian dreamers”, and that it instead should consist of rational individuals who felt a strong and pragmatic connection in their strife to achieve total and uncompromising national freedom in the colonial part of the world? It is of course impossible to look into the mind of Münzenberg in order to find a comprehensive and satisfying answer to this question. But by interpreting Münzenberg’s words we have the possibility to read between the lines what the initial purpose of founding the League was in 1927. It is relevant to have in mind that in 1927, the LAI aimed for a wide attraction of as many affiliated and

\textsuperscript{1} RGASPI, 542/1/69/45a, quote taken from Willi Münzenberg’s speech at the founding Congress of the LAI, 10\textsuperscript{th} of February 1927. Footnotes referring to RGASPI uses the system of Fond / Opis / Delo / List [542/-/-/-] while indicating the source. Files, concerning the activities of the League Against Imperialism, or as it is spelled in Russian, Antiimperialististisheskaja liga [AIL] are all filed in Fond 542 at the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History [RGASPI], formerly known as the Central Party Archive for the Soviet Communist Party.
associated groups, and individuals as possible that carried a diversified political and cultural background. But this is not an extensive and satisfactory explanation. In fact, I must argue, the League wanted to attract groups who advocated utopian ambitions, groups who had a distinct vision before their eyes, and this was the liberation of colonies under imperialist oppression. If we take this discussion a bit further it could also be argued that from the very beginning of the existence of the League, the inclusion of as many visionaries and utopian dreamers as possible was only beneficiary for the leaders of the LAI, namely the Comintern. But what was the LAI aiming for in the long run, after links with interested colonial groups had been established? That is the major issue at stake here.

LAI can be understood as a gigantic international network, with a broad political representation and this in turn made it quite unique, and especially during the first two years of the League’s existence in 1927-29. In the shadow of the League of Nations and the Second International, LAI aimed to highlight the colonial agenda and make this the principal front in their deliberations. A move, which caused the Second International to raise a suspicious eye towards the real purpose of the League, and on the 7th of October 1927 published the *Internationale Information* (organ for the *Socialistischen Arbeiter-Internationale* in Zürich) an critical analysis on the composition and organisational background of the LAI, and in conclusion the article stated that the League was a communist front in the hands of the Bolsheviks in Moscow, with Willi Münzenberg acting as the “spiritus rector” for the whole organization.² I shall return to this discussion later on.

Human beings who were engaged in the colonial and anti-imperialist struggle put the network together, and therefore are these individuals an important component in the understanding of the LAI. The major reason by giving space to these individuals is that they in many cases determined the progression of the League and its network. Another reason is that several of the individuals committed to the cause are still relatively unknown. This in turn makes it necessary to try to distinguish what function these persons had in the construction of a communist front, but also, their position in the Comintern.

II. What can be said about the sources?

The bulk of the source material for my research project is stored in the Comintern archive, which is located in Moscow at the RGASPI archive. What kinds of material does the files in

Moscow consists of then? Concisely, the files offer a deeper insight into LAI, from an organisational perspective, and equally important, how the organization progressed during its existence. Examination of correspondence between members has uncovered both a political and individual dimension.

In detail, the material consists of official and unofficial letters, correspondence between LAI’s International Secretariat in Berlin and the Comintern in Moscow, letters between different sections in the world, instructions sent from Moscow to League sections in the world, and “secret” letters from persons who monitored the work in the LAI. In cases, such as the last example, the correspondents often used an alias while reporting back to Moscow during their stay in Western Europe.

Other relevant material found at the RGASPI archive includes official publications that were published by the LAI, material such as press letters (Pressedienst der Liga gegen Imperialismus, Mitteilungsblatt der Liga gegen koloniale Unterdrückung), journals (The Anti-Imperialist Review).

Comparing the Sources – Methods of Interpretation: The case of Nehru

By comparing correspondence between members with the official material that was published, different angles of interpreting the LAI and its functions are able to make. For example, when the president of the Indian National Congress (INC), Jawaharlal Nehru, left the League on his own premises in the beginning of 1930, a different story was told in LAI’s official organ, Anti-Imperialist Review, 1931. More specific, after the Frankfurt am Main congress in 1929 a campaign of negative criticism was directed by the International Secretariat in Berlin against the INC. The reason for criticising the INC was, according to the League secretariat, that Indian nationalists only strived for a slow process that would reform India’s society and deteriorate the British colonial rule over a longer period of time, instead of a vigilant revolutionary solution where total and uncompromising national independence was the ultimate goal. Nehru responded to the criticism by sending the secretary at the League’s International Secretariat in Berlin, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, an unofficial letter, and at the same time an official letter to the International Secretariat. In the official letter Nehru concludes that due to the controversy that had developed itself between the INC and the LAI.

3 542/1/44/1-5, Report on the Indian National Congress, no date, arrived in Moscow on 1/1-1930.
4 A fuller presentation on who Virendranath Chattopadhyaya was, and what function he had in the LAI, is given later on in the paper under the section “An introduction to Virendranath Chattopadhyaya”.
it seemed that “the sooner we separate the better”, and that “if the League is going to function purely as a communist organization than clearly it is not the place for us”. The background for the conflict between Nehru and the INC with LAI was that the INC actually was willing in 1929 to cooperate with communists, but they would under any circumstances not take orders from the League. The background for the conflict between Nehru and the INC with LAI was that the INC actually was willing in 1929 to cooperate with communists, but they would under any circumstances not take orders from the League.

The next step the secretariat in Berlin decided upon, in response to Nehru’s letters, was to put an end to all cooperation with the INC and Nehru. The decision was then sent to Comintern headquarters in Moscow, and in it the League secretariat gave an explanation on why the Indian National Congress had been expelled, and that the League in the future would continue to attack Nehru, Gandhi and other leaders in the Indian National Congress. Whether or not this was a step taken by the Secretariat in Berlin in order to show Comintern headquarters in Moscow that the League would remain firm in their attitude towards colonial groups such as INC remains to be seen.

In 1931, another explanation to Nehru’s defection was expressed in The Anti-Imperialist Review. As a result of a meeting with the League’s Executive Committee in Berlin May 1931, a “decisive stage” in the development of the LAI had been accomplished according to unknown author F. One of the mechanisms in this stage was the expulsion of members such as former Chairman of the League’s Executive Committee James Maxton (English socialist and active in the Independent Labour Party), Dutch socialist and member of the League’s Executive Committee Edo Fimmen (who had, before he joined LAI, been engaged in the Second International), the Indonesian nationalist Mohammad Hatta, and Nehru from the organization. Nehru is described as an “opportunist” who had “concealed his true face”, who had “played a double game” while using empty revolutionary phraseology. The Executive Committee concluded that such a ”vile politician” as Nehru, who now was a British imperialist agent, should not so easily be able to dupe the League in the future.

As evident, if we consider these three types of documents, the phraseology is different in Nehru’s letter to the International Secretariat, from the one made by the Secretariat and sent to Moscow, and finally, the official argumentation by the League’s Executive Committee and published in the Anti-Imperialist Review 1931.

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5 542/1/44/51-54, Official letter from Jawahar Lal Nehru to the International Secretariat of the LAI, 30/1-1930.
7 542/1/44/55, Decision regarding Nehru and the Indian National Congress by the LAI Secretariat in Berlin, arrived at the ECCI in Moscow on the 2/2-1930.
One can construct a hypothesis that members voluntarily left the League and were not expelled. By using the case of Nehru this assumption gains strength from a qualitative perspective. It illustrates that fronts such as the LAI, and ultimately Comintern, drained itself from what should constitute the backbone of their organization. Thus, a wide network of links to several different groups in the colonies such as socialists, nationalists, pacifists, the labour movement proved to be impossible to hold in their hands, due to the aspiration for total control by the communists, and ultimately, the need for control restricted in what direction the League was going after 1929.

Other aspects on the available sources – Biographies, Autobiographies

The files in the Moscow archive are primarily focused on the political side of the League. The main character, Willi Münzenberg, never published a biography were he went into detail on his life in the Comintern. Though, it has been stated by others that Münzenberg never was a theoretical man, his interest lay more in the practical side of the political work. Instead, it was his wife Babette Gross that came to summarize her husband’s life in the biography Willi Münzenberg – Eine politische Biographie (Stuttgart, 1967). Gross book must though be used with great care, and the information in it must be compared with other sources in order to test its reliability.

The closest we come to an autobiographical description by Münzenberg himself is the book Die Dritte Front (Berlin, 1930). In the book Münzenberg describes how he was engaged in the socialist youth movement in Germany, the political activities while staying in Austria, meeting Lenin, Karl Radek, and other later famous Bolshevik leaders, and, finally, being entrusted by Lenin to organise the International Communist Youth (KIM) in 1919. The book covers a period from 1906 to 1921, and was written as a commemoration to the 10-year Jubilee of the KIM in 1929. Other books written by Münzenberg focuses entirely on political issues, for example Fünf Jahre Internationale Arbeiterhilfe (Berlin, 1926), Solidarität – Zehn Jahre Internationale Arbeiterhilfe, 1921-1931 (Berlin, 1931), and Propaganda als Waffe (Paris, 1937).

Individual accounts of persons, either engaged in the LAI or who met Münzenberg, worth mentioning are Fenner Brockway’s, British socialist and member of the Independent Labour Party, Inside the Left (London, 1942) and Margarete Buber-Neumann’s

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9 Willi Münzenberg, Die Dritte Front, Berlin, 1929, p. 11.
Von Potsdam nach Moskau (Suttgart, 1957). Buber-Neuman describes Münzenberg as a “charming man” and that he was less revolutionary than a business man. She also gives an inside account of the LAI due to fact that she was working as a typist at the secretariat in Berlin for a while.\textsuperscript{10} Author Arthur Koestler’s autobiography The Invisible Writing (London, 1954) gives an interesting account of Münzenberg’s personality, and how he organised his work. Swedish socialist and active in the Comintern during the 1920s, Karl Kilbom, mentions in his autobiography Cirkeln slutes how Münzenberg prophesised on the future development of the Soviet government in 1928, where he proclaimed that it was in a state of disintegration.\textsuperscript{11}

However, by just examining the political dimension on both Münzenberg, and the LAI, an unfocused picture of the League will be constructed and produce incomprehensive explanations. The individual dimension is of an equal importance, namely the ambitions that each person, including Münzenberg, had while they were active in the organization. Combining the political dimension with the individual will thus only be beneficiary for the study of the LAI. For example, letters in the RGASPI archive depicts Münzenberg as a man with grand ambitions and visions, but also as the man that can be perceived as the most important and constructive architect of Communist propaganda in Western Europe during the Interwar era. Whether or not Moscow approved of every step taken by Münzenberg is an issue widely discussed by authors Sean McMeekin and Stephen Koch.\textsuperscript{12}

Letters between active actors illustrates the strain of living and working in the League and Comintern. For example, Hansin Liau, Chinese communist and representative for the Kuomintang, worked at the International Secretariat in Berlin 1927, but came in conflict with Münzenberg on matters concerning money. Liau had not been paid for the work he had been doing at the League secretariat. This had placed Liau in a stressful situation that affected his health, which in turn developed into emotional turmoil since he had a wife and child to provide for.\textsuperscript{13}

Another example is Edo Fimmen’s personal views on Münzenberg as an organiser in 1927. Fimmen participated in the LAI between 1927 and 1929. These views were

\textsuperscript{12} The works I am referring to here are Sean McMeekin’s The Red Millionaire, Yale, 2003 and Stephen Koch, Double Lives, London, 1995.
\textsuperscript{13} 542/1/29/3, Letter from Hansin Liau in Berlin to Mauno Heimo at the ECCI Secretariat in Moscow, the letter arrived in Moscow on the 17th of February 1928.
put together by Chattophadyaya and passed on to Moscow after a conversation he had had with Fimmen in Amsterdam on the 31st of March 1927. Nehru was also part of the conversation. The main purpose with Chattophadyaya’s report was to describe Fimmen’s attitude towards Münzenberg and the League in general. Fimmen thought that Münzenberg was “no organiser”, instead, he only had a “nose” for certain things, which he then enthusiastically forced on others. He further argued that the League’s International Secretariat should be placed in Amsterdam, since there was no chance of having it in London due to the constant surveillance by British authorities, and Berlin was definitely not the right place. The suggestion offended both Chatto and Nehru, and they immediately told this to Fimmen. Just before parting ways (the discussion took place during a walk to the Amsterdam central train station) in Amsterdam, Fimmen declared that he was not afraid of any communists, even though the Comintern had “their eyes everywhere in Brussels”.  

As shown in these three examples above, there was more at stake here than just political ambitions: one detects ambitions for power, self-assertion, or simply, getting paid for the work done in the League.

III. Some Considerations about LAI

LAI was founded as an effect of the Brussels Congress, 10th-15th of February 1927. But the idea of having an international anti-imperialist organization, focusing on colonial oppression and cruelties in the colonies was not new. In 1925 Münzenberg formed, using the channels and administrative machine of his Internationale Arbeiter-Hilfe (IAH) organisation, the Committee against Cruelties in Syria in Berlin, which primarily focused on highlighting the actions taken by the British and French imperialist forces in countries such as Syria, China and Northern Africa. The League Against Colonial Oppression (LACO) was founded the next year in Berlin on the 10th of February 1926. But the establishment of the Committee

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15 Mitteilungsblatt der Liga gegen koloniale Unterdrückung, Der Koloniale Freiheitskampf, Berlin, 15/2-1926.
16 542/1/4/2-4, Protocol from a conference with German organizations and colonial members, 10/2-1926. A paper, which shall be part of a Comintern discussion group in April 2005 at Uppsala University, has been written by the author, dealing with the organization and foundation of the League in 1926-27, and the preparatory work Münzenberg and Gibarti did in organizing the Brussels congress. The title for the paper is “Varför en liga mot imperialism? Grundandet av League Against Imperialism, 1927”. Risto Marjomaa, fellow colleague and historian, is currently working on a paper dealing with the connections the LAI had with African nationalists. Working title for Marjomaa’s paper is “The LACO and the LAI: Willi Münzenberg and Africa”. Another article worth of mentioning in this context is Mustafa Haikal depiction of the LAI in the article “Willi Münzenberg und die ’Liga gegen Imperialismus und für nationale Unabhängigkeit’”, in Willi Münzenberg (1889-1940) – Ein
against Cruelties in Syria and LACO was not an isolated event planned by Münzenberg himself. The Comintern had already articulated plans for an anti-imperialist organization in 1924-25, which were made public in the Comintern organ, *Inprecorr*. The organisation of LAI and LACO shall be discussed further in a coming article by the author (“Varför en liga mot imperialism? Grundandet av League Against Imperialism, 1927”), which will be presented at the Svenska Historikermöte (Meeting of Swedish historians) in Uppsala, Sweden, 22nd-24th of April 2005. Risto Marjomaa is currently writing on an article, focusing on LACO’s attempts to create links with African nationalists in the colonies (working title: “The LACO and the LAI: Willi Münzenberg and Africa”).

Other significant actors to include in this discussion on why LAI saw the light of day is the League of Nations and the attitude the Second (Amsterdam) International had towards the colonial situation. I shall return to this discussion at a later stage.

For how long did LAI exist? No exact date for the liquidation of the LAI have been found yet, but after the Reichstag Fire in Berlin in February 1933, which forced German communists to flee the country, a severe blow to the organization was given. In the first half of 1933, LAI’s International Secretariat was re-opened in Paris. On the 8th of June 1933 Münzenberg sent a letter to “Edwin” in Moscow, where he asked to be released from any responsibilities connected to the League. The major reason given by Münzenberg was that he felt “worn out”, and realised that he was not able to gather the energy required to re-build LAI and its network once again.

On the 15th of September 1933 instructions was sent from Moscow to the secretary of the LAI’s English section, Reginald Bridgeman, telling him that from now on he could consider himself as the new leader of the League. Another explanation for the liquidation of the League is the VII International Comintern Congress in Moscow 1935, where a new a shift in the Comintern policy was introduced (again) with the exclamtion and support of the Popular Front. This marked, according to historian E. H. Carr, that the anti-imperialist agenda no longer had any significant position in the Comintern, with focus now instead was on building up a campaign against war and fascism.

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17 *Inprecorr*, nr.68, p. 1065. *Inprecorr* is an abbreviation for *International Press Correspondence*.
18 542/1/59/45, Letter from Willi Münzenberg in Paris to Edwin in Moscow, 8/6-1933.
19 542/1/58/31-33, Letter from unknown writer in Moscow to Reginald Bridgeman in London, 15/9-1933.
Since the limitation in time stretches from 1921 to 1935, a definition on what to include, apart from the chronological aspect, has to be done. I argue that the individual dimension strengthens the study of LAI’s political ambitions and its network. As mentioned earlier, letters written by active members reveal ambitions, emotions, and difficulties in their personal lives, but also conflicts between involved actors, which mainly focused on the struggle for power, or feelings of discontent with how the League’s work progressed. Combining the political with the individual dimension strengthens therefore the potential to achieve a more thorough qualitative interpretation regarding one of the key problems that constitutes the dissertation:

- What was the purpose of having a League Against Imperialism?
- And what characteristics did the network between Moscow, Berlin, and the LAI have?

An Attempt to Reconstruct the League and its Network

The network of the LAI resembles the one spun by a spider. The dilemma, by choosing such an interpretative approach is, who shall be the spider in the middle of the web? Is it the Comintern, Willi Münzenberg, or something/someone else? The most constructive way is to separate these actors, Comintern and Münzenberg, from each other, and to interpret them as a link between each other. In addition, Comintern and Münzenberg had their own unique networks, and what is of primary concern here is to make LAI and its network the centre of attention.

Münzenberg’s network had several links and individuals such as Virendranath Chattophadyaya and Hungarian Communist Louis Gibarti (whom I shall return to later on in this section) worked very close to him, and thus had a more personal relationship with him, while others can be placed more in the periphery. Another group of persons are those who attached themselves to the anti-imperialist agenda, but later left LAI or simply were expelled.

An examination of the documents in Moscow provides enough information to attempt a first re-construction of the LAI network, and since Münzenberg can be considered as being the “leader”, he has been put in the middle of the network, acting as the spider.

Only the names of certain individuals have been included in the model below. I have chosen not to include their political or social field. The model focuses only on the European aspect of Münzenberg’s anti-imperialist network. Münzenberg’s network with Comintern (limited to the colonial perspective) shall be constructed later. This version should not be perceived as definite at this stage.
Re-construction of the LAI network, 1926-1930

Who were these people that participated in the LAI network? Some of the names, such as the English socialist George Lansbury, the Dutch socialist Edo Fimmen, the Indian nationalist Jawaharlal Nehru, the British communist Reginald Bridgeman, the American communist and Red International Trade Union (RILU, or Profintern) member John W. Ford, and the English socialist James Maxton are known, a priori, through their political work and have left their own mark in the annals of political history.

Others, such as the English socialist Emile Burns and active in the International Secretariat in Berlin 1928, Hungarian communist Louis Gibarti, Kuomintang representative Hansin Liau, or Indian national revolutionary Virendranath Chattophadyaya still remain, to this day, much in the shadow of history. Speaking of Chattophadyaya in this context, a newly published biography on his personal and political life, *Chatto – The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe* by Nirode K. Barooah (Oxford, 2004), has provided with essential information regarding his activities in the LAI, and his life as a Indian nationalist, and ending up as a communist in Europe and the Soviet Union. Barooah started to work on this book as early as in 1972, but due to the problems of not getting access to archives in the Soviet Union, he was not able to finish the biography until recently after access to files in Russia was made possible.21

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This is one of the most fascinating revelations made while analysing the network of LAI. Even though the nerve centre of the organization consisted only of a few people, the network in itself was extensive, in the sense that links connected intellectuals to trade unionists, or communists with nationalists for example. Much of this changed after the Frankfurt am Main Congress in 1929, but the consequences of that congress deserves a separate section.

The nerve centre of the LAI in Western Europe was located at the International Secretariat in Berlin. Between 1926 and 1929, the secretariat mainly consisted of Münzenberg, Gibarti, Liau, and Chattophadyaya, and was located in Münzenberg’s publishing office *Neuer Deutscher Verlag* on Friedrichstrasse 24 in Berlin. The German communist Heinz Neumann’s wife Margarete Buber-Neumann, who was the sister of Münzenberg’s wife Babette Gross, worked for a while there at the secretariat as a typist. The publishing office was also a part of the Münzenberg run organization *Internationale Arbeiter-Hilfe* (IAH), where Gibarti also was active. Gibarti was, together with Münzenberg, the person who attempted to develop LACO into an international network 1926, and assisted in organising the colonial congress in Brussels 1927.

Louis Gibarti, Hungarian Communist (his real name was Laszlo Dobos), worked as a secretary for the LACO and the LAI 1926-27. At the end of 1927, or in the beginning of 1928, Gibarti left his position as secretary of the LAI due to health problems. Paris was Gibarti’s operational base, and both the LAI and the IAH had an office there. As a consequence of his departure, the LAI-headquarter was transferred to Berlin, and, from the beginning of 1928, a process of centralization of the LAI started. In a meeting with the Executive Committee of the League in April 1928, Münzenberg said that Gibarti deserved to be thanked for the work he had done for the League.

But Münzenberg did not lose contact with Gibarti, and as late as 1938 the two met for the last time in Paris. Previous research has suggested that Gibarti was an agent for the Comintern and the NKVD. The assumption is based on the fact that Gibarti knew the Soviet master spy and in charge of espionage in Western Europe for the Soviet Union, Walter G. Krivitsky, and Stephen Koch has suggested in *Double Lives*, that Gibarti in fact was

23 This is a conclusion made from examining sources found in fond 542, and shall be illustrated more thoroughly in coming papers. In my coming article, “Varför en liga mot imperialism?...”, I stress on the importance that Gibarti had in the organisational work.
24 Informations Bulletin der Liga gegen Imperialismus, Nr.1, 15/3-1928; 542/1/27/16-28, Protocol of a meeting with the Executive Committee of the League, sent from Münzenberg to Bukharin, 24/5-1928.
responsible for several activities connected directly to espionage. For example, Koch argues that Gibarti was the person who attracted the famous Cambridge trio (Kim Philby, Guy Burgess, and Donald Maclean) to become spies for the Soviet Union in the 1930s. An issue widely investigated and interpreted by several authors and researchers. These explanations, clearly in the vein of conspiracy, have become one of the “schools” of interpretation when it comes to understanding the dynamics and functions of the Comintern nowadays. The consideration of espionage and various illegal activities, all done in the name for a higher cause, in this case, world revolution and the progression of socialism, naturally gains energy while explaining the world of Comintern through a prism of conspiracy. Whether or not this assists in giving a concise picture when it comes to the LAI remains to be seen, and therefore must this interpretative door remain open at this stage.

An introduction to Virendranath Chattophadyaya

Virendranath Chattophadyaya (more known as Chatto) took over Gibarti’s role as secretary in the LAI. At a meeting with the Executive Committee in Brussels on the 28th of April 1928 Chattophadyaya was elected, together with Münzenberg, as the new secretaries of the League. The protocol from the meeting portrays what political character the League aimed for in 1928, and the need for having a wide political composition. Edo Fimmen put forward the argument that the International Secretariat ought to have links with social democrats, labour unions, communists, and representatives from colonial countries (China, India, or Indonesia). Thus, came the decision that the political composition of the bureau in Berlin should consist of Maxton (socialist), Fimmen (trade unionist), Chatto (member of the national revolutionary movement), and Münzenberg (communist).

Much of Chatto’s life as a Comintern functionary is still much unknown apart from the recently published book by Barooah, previously mentioned. Investigations in different archives have though started to put different pieces together concerning Chatto’s life. The Russian historian Apollon Davidson has compiled a short biographical note on Chatto, and in Davidson’s account it is stated that Chatto became a member of the Communist Party in Germany 1927, and during 1927-31 he was active at the League Secretariat in Berlin. In

26 542/1/27/16-28, Protocol of a meeting with the Executive Committee of the League, Brussels 28/4-1928, sent from Münzenberg to Bukharin, 24/5-1928. Chattophadyaya shortened his surname to Chatto, and most of the letters written by him is also signed with “Chatto”. I shall here on after use Chatto in the text.
August 1931 Chatto left Berlin, heading for Moscow. This was his only option, since he was refused to enter France, and the situation at the League’s secretariat in Berlin was in situation of constant observation by German police and authorities. After arriving in Moscow and working there as an editor during 1932, Chatto joined one of the institutes at the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in Leningrad. Much of this was made possible because of his friendship with Sergey Kirov, prominent Bolshevik, who was murdered on the 1st of December in 1934. Chatto was, amongst many other people who had or were working for the Comintern, executed during the purge of the Comintern in 1937.28

But what had Chatto been up to before 1927? In order to answer this, and to provide with a rough background to Chatto and his life, certain specific documents have provided with essential information, apart from Barooah’s depiction.

A file, containing material on the LAI, is stored in Stockholm, Sweden. This file is filed in mayor Carl Lindhagen’s collection at Stockholms City Archive (SCA), and consists mostly of official material (pamphlets, journals), documents from the Frankfurt am Main congress 1929, and a couple of letters between Lindhagen and Chatto. Two documents deserve extra attention, while drawing up a rough historical background to Chatto’s life before he became engaged in LAI, and as Münzenberg’s second hand in the anti-imperialist movement. One is a letter, composed by Lindhagen regarding Chatto’s expulsion from Sweden in 1921, and the second is draft for an article by Chatto, and telegraphed from Berlin to Stockholm in 1921.

Chatto was born in India on the 31st of October 1880, coming from a wealthy family, being the second child out of eight. In 1902 went Chatto to England, with the purpose of protesting against the British colonial rule over India, but also to study law.29 The issue of British imperialism was during his life always present in Chatto’s political activities, and he can be perceived as a lobbyist in some cases. He had to leave England, due to political reasons, when the First World War broke out in 1914, and after leaving London Chatto embarked on a European excursion, where countries such as Turkey, Switzerland, and Germany were visited.30

After arriving in Sweden 1917, Chatto put together the opening up of the Bureau of the Indian Committee, which in turn had links with the Indian Nationalist

28 Davidson 2003, p.xiv; Barooah 2004, p.283-285; see also Boris A. Starkov’s article “The Trial that was not Held”, in Europe-Asia Studies, December 1994 for an intriguing interpretation of the Comintern purge in 1937. Starkov focus especially on the case that was build against one of the most important persons in Comintern, Osip Piatnitsky.
30 SCA volume 131, Handwritten manuscript by Carl Lindhagen, no date, year is probably 1921.
Revolutionary Committee that had its headquarters in Berlin. Being in Stockholm in 1917 put him in contact with both Swedish socialists and socialists from different countries. Stockholm, acting as a melting pot and meeting place for socialist from all over the world, made Chatto realise that a permanent bureau had to established, which would promote the message that Indian nationalists were spreading, namely, anti-imperialism.\footnote{Barooah 2004, p.105. In 1917 Lenin passed through Stockholm on his way to Finland, and finally Russia. Also, in 1917 arrangements for a peace conference were at the center for the socialist movement. This event is more known as the Stockholm Peace Conference, it did not take place, but contacts between socialists from all over the world, which would not have happened otherwise, was sort of a result of the “conference”.} The bureau pursued the political work for about two years, without being disrupted by the Swedish Foreign Office and police authorities. Chatto occupied himself with publishing articles in the Socialist press on the present condition in India. But in 1919, the police started to show an interest in Chatto’s political work, and finally, after a meeting with Police inspector Hallgren in Stockholm, he was recommended to take up a “non-political” profession if he wanted ease on the attention the Foreign Office had started to show in him. In response to this, Chatto decided to give lectures on the Hindustani language at Stockholms Borgarskola, and he started a translation bureau with some friends. But in 1920 the political work was resumed again, with the publication of new articles on India and the effects of British colonial rule.\footnote{SCA volume 131, Telegraphed manuscript for an article written by V. Chattophadyaya, Berlin 15/5-1921. Articles were published in Swedish leftist newspapers such as Folkets Dagblad Politiken, Aftonbladet, Klockan to name a few. Chatto also published articles in the conservative press such as Nya Dagligt Allehanda, the liberal Dagens Nyheter.}

At the end of 1920 Chatto went to Soviet Russia in matters concerning ‘business’. The publication of new articles had though led to new reprimands from the police authorities in Sweden, and caused Chatto to focus entirely on business, according to him. The purpose for travelling to Soviet Russia was to sell 2 million pairs of boots to the Soviet government. After arriving in Reval on the 13\textsuperscript{th} of November, Chatto decided to travel all the way to Moscow. A decision taken by Chatto since the bureaucratic procedure, concerning whether or not the Soviet government would buy the boots, would take some time. If he went to Moscow, the matter might be solved quicker. But another motive for going to Moscow, as stated by Chatto, was to study the political and economic conditions in Soviet Russia, which were of “vital interest”, since he now identified himself as a “revolutionary”. The trip to Soviet Russia lasted for about a month, and he arrived back in Stockholm on the 17\textsuperscript{th} of December. The boots were not sold; they were too small according to the Soviet government, and thus, were of no value since they could not be used.\footnote{SCA volume 131, Telegraphed manuscript for an article written by V. Chattophadyaya, Berlin 15/5-1921.}
On the 4th of January 1921 Chatto left for a second ‘business trip’, this time the destination was Frankfurt am Main in Germany. After completing his business at the end of March and wishing to return to Sweden, the Swedish Legation in Berlin denied him an entry visa. An explanation for this is that Chatto had lived in Sweden as a political refugee since March 1919. Before that, he had been in possession of a German Identity Card (Ausweis). Therefore, it was necessary for him to apply for an entry visa if he wanted to enter Sweden again after being abroad. Why was Chatto denied entry back? The major motive for denying him an entry visa back to Sweden, according to himself, was not that he in 1921 identified himself as a communist, something not illegal in Sweden, and he had told inspector Hallgren at the police authorities in Stockholm about his present political colour. No, it was the fact that he was an Indian revolutionary, with nationalist ambitions, promoting aggressive anti-imperialist propaganda against the British, and striving for the national liberation of India in the vein of self-determination. A term, originally introduced by the League of Nations at the Peace Conference in Versailles 1919. According to Chatto, the British authorities had orchestrated a manoeuvre, in cooperation with the Swedish Foreign Office, in order to deny him entry back to Sweden. The betrayal by the Swedish government against the Indian liberation movement, because of his expulsion would not be easily forgotten concluded Chatto in the manuscript.34

Did Chatto remain in Germany after this incident? Information given by both Barooah and Gross tells us that Chatto established close links with other Indian nationalists and communist who also had found that Berlin was a haven for political activities in the beginning of the 1920s. One of the Indian contacts Chatto established in Berlin was with Manabendranath Roy, equally active in lobbying propaganda against British imperialism. In 1922, Roy began publishing a periodical named “The Vanguard of Indian Independence”, and at this moment in time Roy, Chatto and Münzenberg became friends.35 According to Barooah, Chatto remained in Berlin where he founded The Indian News Service and Information Bureau (INSIB).36 As early as May 1921, Chatto together with other Indian revolutionaries, went to Moscow and attended the Third Congress of the Comintern, which would begin on the 7th of July.37

34 SCA volume 131, Handwritten manuscript by Carl Lindhagen, no date, year is probably 1921; Telegraphed manuscript for an article written by V. Chattophadyaya, Berlin 15/5-1921. Chatto lived at the Kurfürsten Hotel in Berlin during this time.
36 Barooah 2004, see chapter 6.
However, Chatto came to play an important role in the enlargement of the LAI, where he used his personal connection with people such as Jawaharlal Nehru, in order to make these individuals more willing to participate in developing the League into an international organization. This perspective shall be more thoroughly examined.

IV. Examination of a Communist Front: From Right to Left – Stalinization and the League Against Imperialism

After LAI had been established in 1927, it was to follow united front guidelines and, consequently, controlled by the Comintern in Moscow. This is not a sensational fact; on the contrary, when LAI was established in 1927, many of the delegates to the Brussels Congress actually came to the conclusion that the communists and the Comintern were the actual organisers of the congress. 38

What is of interest here is that with LAI, we have a chance to analyse an organization that was controlled and run by Communists in Western Europe in conjunction with the Comintern in Moscow from its very beginning. It is important to observe how the numerous changes affected the political work within the LAI, and that these changes determined the development during its existence. The original intention with LAI was to create, and develop, it into a front organization aiming for wide stratum of political and cultural groups. The organization proclaimed itself to be a non-political organization in its first period, but found itself being in a state of transformation that shaped it into a sectarian Communist group in the beginning of the 1930s. Further, an investigation about the LAI offers a possibility to understand how Comintern adjusted itself to the problems of how to adapt to the process of Stalinization that emerged in the Soviet society in the late 1920s.

The shifts in policy-making in the Comintern apparat caused confusion. Historians Alexander Dallin and F.I. Firsov state that the shifts between left and right policies “bedevilled the policymakers throughout the life of the Comintern”. After the 6th International Comintern Congress in 1928, a shift towards the left or, as Dallin and Firsov has put it, “an ultra-leftist course” was embarked upon which lasted until 1934. ‘Left’ in this case indicates utopianism, optimism, and a stress on transformation, mobilization, centralization as well as voluntarism. Rightist tendencies imply pragmatism, pessimism, gradualism and determinism. A “rightist” strategy aimed at united fronts, or popular fronts, against a certain enemy or

38 542/1/7/89, Letter from Willi Münzenberg in Brussels to the ECCI Secretariat in Moscow, 13/2-1927.
cause, for example fascism, war, or imperialism.\textsuperscript{39} Could it be that LAI found itself in this context being in a situation where attempts to create an organization, which aimed at having a wide representation of different political and cultural groups, was not appreciated by the Bolshevik political elite in Moscow? This remains to be further investigated in both the sources from the Comintern archive, and other types of material.

**Presentation of important terms**

*Transformation* indicates the organisational and ideological changes LAI underwent. While referring to the organization as undergoing a process of transformation this should be understood through different perspectives. First, the term transformation indicates change in its neutral sense, and can be viewed upon as both negative and positive. The changes that were inflicted on LAI affected not only the individuals that were engaged in the League, but also the political agenda. The political transformation of the League changed, at first, from being an organization that promoted colonial freedom - an approach that made it possible to attract national reformist groups such as the INC and Kuomintang to affiliate with League - to become a more outspoken communist grouping after the Frankfurt am Main congress in 1929. The Indonesian nationalist Mohammed Hatta described in an article, published 1929, that the situation in the League was in a process of “purification” after that congress. Hatta’s retrospective thoughts on the future for the League asked the question: where was the League going? The purification Hatta was referring to indicated that the LAI was facing some form of transformation, and that the “hardcore elements” among the communists were directing this situation. According to Hatta, this would lead to a situation where every non-communist element would be excluded from the League, and finally, the LAI would only consist of communists and Eastern nationalists.\textsuperscript{40}

Hatta’s account indicates that he regarded the purification of the League to lead to a solitary, single-minded group promoting a revolutionary approach and using aggressive language against former members, while at the same time trying to be a representative for anti-imperialist and colonial groups. The political transformation therefore changed the personal composition of the League, and individuals who weren’t communists either voluntarily left, or were excluded, from the LAI.


\textsuperscript{40} Mohammad Hatta, “A retrospective account of the Second Congress of the League against Imperialism and for National Independence held in Frankfurt”, in *Portrait of a Patriot*, The Hague, 1972, p. 200-204. The article was published in *Indonesia Merdeka*, 1929.
Second, the LAI went through several practical changes after the foundation of the organization in 1927. The organisational structure passed through three phases, before it was liquidated in 1935, as follows:


Throughout LAI’s existence, tendencies of transformation were always present. The Communist element in the organization, Münzenberg, Gibarti, and Chattophadyaya to name a few, aimed for a situation where control was to remain in their hands from the very beginning. To exemplify this assumption one can mention Münzenberg’s letter to the ECCI Secretariat on the 21st of February 1927, where he argued that control over the anti-imperialist network had to remain in the “hands of Comintern”.41

The composition of the network and its political structure lost its diversified representation because of the voluntarily defection by important actors, or that some were considered useless by the League. This transformed the network from being a broad base of different people and organizations, to becoming a narrow and single-minded network. By understanding the first aim of the League, namely to attract colonial organizations to affiliate themselves with the LAI, one ends up arguing that the League wanted to gain control over the affiliated groups. The end-effect was a non-productive development for the LAI. One can be harsh by concluding that the League more or less decapitated itself by seeking to control every organization that was affiliated with the LAI.

The different phases of the LAI are summarized in a three-stage model (below). The model attempts to further illustrate this argument. Arrows indicate lines of attachment between affiliated organizations to the LAI.

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41 542/1/7/120-123, Letter from Willi Münzenberg to the ECCI Secretariat, 21/2-1927.
Since the goal, during the first phase of the organization, was to establish links with a number of organizations who voluntarily wanted to affiliate themselves with LAI, the arrows therefore points at LAI. The League, while describing the aims and objects of the organization, used the term “affiliate” as a way defining the political work. And through this phase of affiliation should “constant agitation” against imperialism be conducted.\(^{42}\) The model illustrates how LAI transformed its pattern of attachment, and phase II illustrates how the League attempted to gain control over organizations that previously were affiliated to, but not controlled by LAI. One example of this is the conflict between the INC and the International Secretariat in Berlin 1930, previously mentioned in the text.

A distinction between “affiliated” and “associated” is worth mentioning briefly. In the case of the INC, and with the voluntarily defection of Nehru from the League’s Executive Committee in 1930, the discussion of association is accentuated by Nehru himself. According to Nehru, the INC was willing to co-operate and associate itself with communists, and any form of anti-imperialist organization, but under no circumstances would it take orders from communists just because the communists thought that the Congress was affiliated with the LAI.\(^{43}\) What conclusions can be drawn from this example? Maybe it was a difference of outlook between the communist fraction in the League and non-communist elements that created such controversies between the International Secretariat and INC in how to interpret the meaning of being affiliated. For the communists in the LAI affiliation meant that other organizations were a part of the League, and not just associated. The INC, and others for that matter, again felt that they were working side by side with the LAI in a relationship that could be defined as associated.

The need for the communists to control every corner and aspect of the LAI paralysed the League to pursue any constructive work in the end. This can in turn be explained by the control that the Comintern in Moscow had put on the International Secretariat in Berlin.

After the Reichstag Fire in Berlin on the 27\(^{th}\) of February 1933, the League and its International Secretariat was shattered. The organisational structure of the communists in Germany did not after this event re-gain any of its strength, and in the fall of 1933 the International Secretariat of the League was transferred from Paris to London.

\(^{42}\) 542/1/31/3, League Against Imperialism and for National Independence STATUTES, no year is given but it is probably 1927.

\(^{43}\) Gopal 1975, p. 139.
The organisational pattern of the LAI and Comintern

The archival sources have given an opportunity to distinguish an organisational pattern concerning the League and Comintern. This is also one of the primary goals with the analysis of the League. The question is:

- How was the League organised and can it be established how communication between different sections of the LAI and the Comintern worked?

Another second question of great importance is:

- To what extent did the Comintern decide in this communication?

“Line of communication” implies in what direction communication was going. Sometimes it went one-way, but in other cases communication was mutually exchanged, for example, the communication between the International Secretariat in Berlin and the Eastern Secretariat in Moscow. However, how should one define the network, and what was the purpose of having a network? At this stage of the investigation one can understand the network between Moscow, Berlin, and the League, as a means were two or more relationships are connected to each other. The basic function in this case is the exchange of information, and that exchange was constant. For example, the exchange between the LAI’s International Secretariat in Berlin with the Small Commission or the Eastern Secretariat in Moscow were an intimate relationship and information passed through these channels frequently. Thus, by viewing LAI and attempting to understand it from a network perspective, a more stringent interpretation is able to make at this stage.

The organisational structure of the Comintern is an issue widely discussed, but still, in some cases, is perceived as a secret code that seems hard to break. Much of this can be explained by the extensive bureaucratic apparat that was constructed in the Comintern, and that this apparat underwent several re-organisations during its existence. However, access to the Comintern archive gives a new opportunity of breaking the ‘code’, like the research conducted by historian Peter Huber on the central apparatus of the Comintern.44

Aino Kuusinen, wife of Otto W. Kuusinen, describes in her autobiography Viiskola nästan alla dö (Stockholm, 1972) in large detail the organisational structure of the Comintern. Her account discloses that the decision-making process in the Comintern was constructed after hierarchical principles. The hierarchy can be deconstructed in three steps.

On the first step of the ladder was the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), which consisted of 30 individuals, who were elected during Comintern’s International Congresses. The committee consisted of representatives from Comintern’s international sections (Communist parties and international organizations affiliated with Comintern). Step two was the Political Secretariat, consisting of 8-10 members. This secretariat supervised the day-to-day work, seeing to it that matters were taken care of correctly. On the top of the ladder was the Small Commission (Uskaja Komissija). With three permanent members, who also were active in the Political Secretariat, the Small Commission decided what direction the Comintern should take.\footnote{Documents found in the LAI files point towards that the International Secretariat in Berlin stood in regular contact with Small Commission. In a letter, sent from Chattophadyaya 1929, the names of the members of the Small Committee are given. They were Otto W. Kuusinen, Osip Piatnitsky, and Manuilsky.}

Turning back attention to the League’s organisational pattern, two facts have to be established. First, a geographical difference in lines of communication is evident. The distance between Moscow and Berlin made it difficult, in some cases, to transport important information, and how to deliver information could be difficult since security by the boarders were tight. A courier sometimes had to be very inventive in order to hide certain information. Second, a limited circuit of individuals were involved in decision-making processes relating to the League.

The following organisational chart is an attempt to illustrate the structural fundaments of the network, using a hierarchical perspective, and to include the different sections within Comintern who participated in League activities. It should not be perceived as definite at this stage. Arrows indicate lines of communication (see below).

\footnote{Aino Kuusinen, Vi skola nästan alla dö, 1972, p. 36.}
\footnote{542/1/30/104-106, Letter from V. Chattophadyaya to the Small Commission, 14/10-1929.}
The chart shows a web of different sections, intertwined with each other. What needs to be done now is to make distinctions between the various sections. The Moscow part of the web depicts an intricate system, where lines of communication tend to be complicated to understand at first sight. If we leave aside the bureaucratic aspect of the Comintern apparatus, the chart reveals two sections of special importance, namely the Small Commission in Moscow and the International Secretariat in Berlin.

The International Secretariat consisted of Münzenberg and Chattophadyaya, and had the same function as the Political Secretariat of the Comintern in Moscow. This was to oversee the current political work of the League, act as the administrative side of the League, and take care of financial issues.

What is of great importance is to show that a few people were in charge of conducting League work. A typical example of this is how the Brussels Congress in 1927 was organised, and how instructions were sent from the ECCI secretariat to Münzenberg in the summer of 1926.\textsuperscript{47}

Speaking of the chart, much of it is based on information, taken from the LAI files in Moscow, covering a period of four years (1926-29). After the Frankfurt am Main Congress in 1929 the League was about to embark on journey of transformation. This in turn

\textsuperscript{47} 542/1/3/15-17, Letter from the secretariat of the ECCI in Moscow to Willi Münzenberg, 6/7-1926.
makes it necessary to construct a second charter of the organisational structure of the LAI and its line of communications with the Comintern.

VI. Periodization of the League Against Imperialism

A concise periodization on the life of the League provides with a more comprehensive picture on how the development of LAI. The content has been adjusted after the three phases, suggested before, the League went through.

The periodization is not to be perceived as definite, as it is at this stage undergoing a constant process of evaluation.

1. Pre-1926: The foundation of the Anti-Fascist League. A move instigated by IAH and Münzenberg in 1923. The foundation of the Committee Against Cruelties in Syria in Berlin 1925. This committee can be understood as the embryo, which would in 1927 become LAI. These are typical examples on how Münzenberg constructed and organized united fronts. 48

2. Founding/establishing phase of LAI – 1926-1927. League Against Colonial Oppression (LACO), formed on the 10th of February 1926 by German communists in Berlin. The organization, at this stage, was a front, based in Berlin and more or less active only in Germany, with a limited international network. Preparation for a coming colonial congress and the construction of an anti-imperial agenda was of primary concern for LACO during 1926. Comintern remained in the background, acting anonymously, and sending instructions to Münzenberg in Berlin. 49

3. Organisational phase of the League – 1927-1928. The Brussels Congress was held between the 10th and the 15th of February 1927. The formal front was LACO, but IAH and Münzenberg were arrangers of the congress and in the background, Comintern monitored the event. The congress saw the official annunciation of LAI, with the ambition to become an international organization. The Executive Committee held three meetings this year, and a meeting with the General Council in Brussels on the 9-11 of December. In 1927 a number of persons joined but soon after left the organization, for example English socialists George Lansbury and Fenner Brockway, whereas others joined (James Maxton, Hansin Liau). Even the mayor of Stockholm, Carl Lindhagen, long-time socialist and devoted to humanitarian issues throughout the world, showed an interest in joining LAI 1927. One of the main goals was to strengthen the network in countries where the League had any sections, or to establish sections where none existed. But control over the sections had to remain in the hands of the communists, as Münzenberg pointed out in a letter to the Secretariat in Moscow. 50 Organisational matters were of primary concern during 1928.

48 542/1/1/1-2, Statues for collecting money for the International Struggle against Fascism Fund, 11/1-1923.
49 542/1/15-17, Letter from the ECCI Secretariat in Moscow to Willi Münzenberg in Berlin, 6/7-1926.
50 542/1/7/120-123, Letter from Willi Münzenberg to the Secretariat of the Comintern in Moscow, 21/2-1927.
4. Sixth Congress of the Comintern in Moscow, **August 1928**. The congress delivered a new message to Comintern organizations, parties, and groups, implying that a radical shift in Comintern policy towards affiliated elements was coming. Radicalisation of policies towards Social Democrats’, the Labour movement, attacks toward “rightist” tendencies inside of the Communist Party and the Comintern were propagated by Stalin and the Russian Communist Party.

5. *Transformation begins* – September **1928-1929**. Plans for a second international congress in 1929 are drawn up, and between the 20th and 31st of July the congress was held in Frankfurt am Main. For LAI and its network, the congress can be understood as a turning point and the start for a process of transformation. Or as Indonesian nationalist Mohammed Hatta put it, “a purification process”. The process involved the communist fraction in the League and their attempt to gain uncompromising control over the organization. After the congress and in the fall of 1929 many members left LAI voluntarily, or were expelled. A report from the International Secretariat in Berlin tells how the composition of the Executive Committee had changed. Members such as Jawaharlal Nehru, James Maxton, Mohammed Hatta, Edo Fimmen, Diego Rivera was not considered to be a part of the League anymore.\(^51\) Before the Congress, an election had been done in Executive Committee, which approved of the suggestion that a representative of the Profintern would hold a permanent seat in the League. The Profintern representative was Melnitschanski.\(^52\)

6. *Chaos and disorder*, 1930: Chaos within the organisational structure at the beginning of 1930, and in August during Profintern’s Congress in Moscow, an investigation by Comintern functionary and secretary of LAI, Boleslav Smeral, was conducted. The investigation had been put into plan after a suggestion made by the Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern, concerning the need to reactive or reorganise the League, since it was thought of being in a state of chaos. Smeral was instructed to ask representatives from various countries to tell their opinion about the activities done by the League so far in their countries.\(^53\)

7. *Deconstruction and Reconstruction of the Front – 1930-1932*. In 1931, several of former involved persons in LAI are officially expelled from the League, labelled as “social fascists” or “imperialist agents and spies”. Several of these persons had though already voluntarily left LAI 1929-30. LAI joined the IAH in a demonstration, celebrating the day of proletarian solidarity in 1930.\(^54\) Other fronts were created, and in some cases had a similar agenda as LAI, for example the *World Committee Against Fascism and War*, founded in 1932. The German police raided the League office in Berlin several times, leaving the secretariat in a state of confusion and uncertainty on how to carry on their activities.\(^55\)

8. *The Decline and Liquidation of LAI – 1933-1935*. The Nazis came into power in Germany in 1933. German communists escaped under chaotic conditions after the Reichstag Fire in February. The International Secretariat was relocated to Paris, but the organization in itself was shattered. Münzenberg asked to be released from any

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51 542/1/44/20-23, Report from the International Secretariat in Berlin to the ECCI in Moscow, 11/1-1930.
52 542/1/30/3-4, Letter from Willi Münzenberg to Otto W. Kuusinen [?], 20/1-1929.
53 See 542/1/42 for further details.
54 Willi Münzenberg, see *Solidarität – Zehn Jahre Internationale Arbeiterhilfe, 1921-1931*, Berlin, 1931.
55 542/1/56/2, Letter from "Hans/Hanz" in Berlin to V. Chattophadyaya in Moscow, 21/1-1932.
responsibilities concerning the League, since he was unable to continue any constructive work. He recommended that the International Secretariat should be moved to Great Britain, where Reginald Bridgeman ought to be put in charge of the League.\textsuperscript{56} In September the same year, Bridgeman receives instructions from the Secretariat of the ECCI telling him that he is in charge of leading LAI.\textsuperscript{57} However, all what Bridgeman received, after getting full responsibility of LAI, was a list of addresses that was not up to date, and of “little value”.\textsuperscript{58}

The Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935 illustrated that the League had played out its role, with the Comintern supporting the Popular Front. Peculiar though, this was again, in the history of Comintern, a return to methods similar to ones during the United Front era, which again saw the approval by the Comintern to promote an agenda against a common enemy or cause.

Terms such as establishment, organisation, transformation, and reactivation, describes the different organisational dimensions and different phases LAI went through. Due to the rift the Frankfurt am Main congress caused within the organization, the network lost many of its connective links. The network had therefore to be reconstructed. But how, and who were willing to participate in this reconstruction? The voluntarily defection of several former important members can be explained mainly from the uncompromising character of the communists in the League and the unwillingness to agree on certain matters with the non-communists in the League. Some of the members in the Executive Committee were also gaining attention and a rise in popularity, for example Jawaharlal Nehru. This was not approved of by the communist fraction in the League, and in a suggestion made by Münzenberg and sent to Moscow in August 1929, he utters the possible need of getting rid of Nehru before he rises too much in popularity, while active in the League and its Executive Committee.\textsuperscript{59}

**Smeral’s Investigation of the LAI 1930 – Reactivate or Reorganise?**

The “purification process” of the LAI that Hatta had referred to in 1929 became apparent in 1930. One example of this is Bohumir Smeral’s, communist from Czechoslovakia and Comintern agent, investigation of the League. It seems as if the Comintern had come to the conclusion by 1930 that the LAI needed to be straightened up and critically investigated. The ECCI Secretariat of the Comintern in Moscow realised that, after the Frankfurt congress in 1929, the League was in a state of chaos, and could be considered as a defunct organization,

\textsuperscript{56} 542/1/59/45, Letter from Willi Münzenberg in Paris to Edwin in Moscow, 8/6-1933.
\textsuperscript{57} 542/1/58/31-33, Confidential letter from unknown writer in Moscow to Reginald Bridgeman, 15/9-1933.
\textsuperscript{58} 542/1/61/1-2, Report from the International Secretariat of the LAI, author Reginald Bridgeman, to unknown receiver in Moscow, 10/3-1935.
\textsuperscript{59} 542/1/30/82-84, Letter from Willi Münzenberg to “Sch” in Moscow, 12/8-1929.
with no clear agenda and a broken network. Why Smeral was put in charge of conducting an investigation is still unclear. What is known is that Smeral was appointed by the Small Commission in Moscow as secretary at the International Secretariat in Berlin along side with Münzenberg and Chatto in the fall of 1929. However, the League already had two secretaries, so why was Smeral selected as secretary, which now meant that the secretariat consisted of three secretaries? One can postulate that this was one of the first steps taken by Moscow in order to start an investigation of the League. Chatto criticized the decision taken in Moscow, and argued that Smeral had “no connections whatever in the colonial countries … we shall only be adding a superfluous, superficial politician to the Secretariat, instead of comrades with real knowledge”.

Despite of Chatto’s protest to the Small Commission, Smeral was appointed as secretary, but his role in the League is still somewhat vague. Was he put in this position in order to monitor Münzenberg and Chatto’s work at the International Secretariat in Berlin? Evidence points in that direction, and since he was put in charge of conducting an investigation of the League, the period between the fall of 1929 to the summer of 1930 can be seen as a period of “watch and learn” for Smeral on how the organization functioned and study the character of its international network.

The need to reactivate the organization was of primary concern, if an anti-imperialist agenda was to continue. Losowsky, representative from the Eastern Secretariat, decided together with the leader of the Eastern Secretariat of the Profintern, Heller, that Smeral ought to approach representatives from colonial and imperialist countries at the Profintern congress in Moscow in August 1930. Just before the Congress, the Eastern Secretariat of the ECCI sent out an official letter to its sections in the world where it was recommended that delegates ought to give their general views on the League, and on what has been done, or not done so far. This meant, more specifically, to meet with Smeral in Moscow at a prearranged location, Hotel Lux, and to discuss on how to strengthen the LAI, or how to create such an organization if it did not exist in certain country or region.

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60 542/1/30/104-106, Letter from V. Chattophadyaya to the Small Commission in Moscow, 14/10-1929. The Small Commission consisted of Otto W. Kuusinen, Manuilsky, and Osip Piatnitsky.
61 542/1/42/1, Manuscript by Smeral, 17/10-1930.
62 Hotel Lux was the hotel were all foreign Comintern functionaries stayed during their visit in Moscow.
63 542/1/42/2-4, Official letter from the ECCI Eastern Secretariat in Moscow, 14/8-1930.
How did the League Against Imperialism promote their Anti-imperialist Agenda?

Discussions on how to organise the League, on what should be done in the imperialist and colonial countries to develop sections of the League, and what to do appears frequently in fond 542. But these aspects were often theoretical, and in some cases, did not lead to any progression or concrete results. So the question is: What was actually done, in practice, by the League in order to promote their agenda?

Stephen Koch argues in his book *Double Lives* that the LAI merely was an instrument for “propaganda, sabotage, and espionage”.64 This conclusion offers though only one side of the coin, and is not very correct in some aspects. After examining the sources one can fairly agree with Koch that propaganda was one of the primary goals with the League’s work. But on the other hand, Münzenberg’s main speciality was to orchestrate demonstrations of propaganda. In one report back to Mauno Heimo, Finnish communist and Comintern functionary, Münzenberg is describing his plans on how to organise a big demonstration against Mussolini in 1928. The report is a blueprint on how Münzenberg enthusiastically committed himself to his line of trade, namely propaganda. At the end of the report Münzenberg tells Heimo on what grounds the work of propaganda ought to be done. First, clearness in the political program was essential, and that the campaign should be widely exposed. Second, after the political line was decided upon, Münzenberg expected to act independently in organising and administer the campaign. If these two wishes were approved of in Moscow, Münzenberg was prepared to cooperate ‘on all levels’.65 Propaganda, and how to organise it, is not a breathtaking fact when it comes to understanding the basic functions of the League and Münzenberg.

Traces of plans for any form of sabotage have not been found in fond 542. And what kind of sabotage Koch relates the League to is not mentioned in his book either. Maybe Koch has used a conception about the Comintern as an instigator of sabotage, and that the fronts run by them was the practical instrument. This conception is more viable to use in the history of Comintern before 1924. One example of this is the failed attempt to seize power in Germany 1923 by revolutionary means. An operation organised from Moscow that mostly

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64 Koch 1995, p. 64.
65 542/1/29/20-22, Report from Willi Münzenberg in Berlin to Mauno Heimo in Moscow, 18/5-1928.
failed due to problems of communication between different actors who participated in the event.\textsuperscript{66}

Espionage is certainly a valid interpretation made by Koch. Previous research and literature has both discussed and suggested that especially in the 1930s the Comintern was penetrated by OGPU/NKVD, which then used the Comintern as a base for operating its espionage in foreign countries. Niels Erik Rosenfeldt discusses this in great detail in \textit{Stalin’s Secret Chancellery and the Comintern} (Copenhagen, 1991). Gary Kern in \textit{A Death in Washington} (New York, 2003) has examined the life of Soviet master spy Walter G. Krivitsky, in which an observation on what role Comintern had in the Soviet espionage apparat is made. Other books worth of mentioning in this context is Krivitsky’s biography \textit{In Stalin’s Secret Service} (New York, 1939), and Aino Kuusinen in \textit{Vi skola nästan alla dö}.

But have the sources in Moscow given any hint in what kind of fields the LAI promoted their agenda? According to a quarterly report by Gibarti, covering the period April-August 1927, the political work by the League was possible by via five different techniques:

1. Announcements of solidarity with groups in the colonies through telegrams, resolutions etc., and with an own press campaign.
2. Public meeting campaigns organised by the League.
3. To make other groups interested and to participate.
4. Parliamentary action.
5. Massive actions of help, in cooperation with every sympathising and affiliated organizations.\textsuperscript{67}

The five techniques do not characterise a group that was planning sabotage. On the contrary, it resembles more an organization that appears to be pacifist in its approach. If we turn back attention to the aims that were promoted for the LACO in 1926, during the organisational phase of putting the first international congress together, they were:

1. A full enquiry into the working condition in the colonial or semi-colonial countries;
2. The initiation of an international protest movement against the cruelties and oppressions committed by the military forces of the imperialist powers;
3. The organization of an international relief action in favour of the most endangered nations that were in need of moral and material support;

\textsuperscript{67} 542/1/17/31-39, Quarterly report by Louis Gibarti to ECCI in Moscow, no date. The report covers the period 15/4-20/9-1927.
4. The linking up of all forces fighting against imperialism and the establishment of permanent relations between all important parties and political groups conducting this fight.\(^{68}\)

To acquire knowledge on the present condition in the colonial part of the world seemed to of major importance for the League in its first period of existence. By demonstrating their presence as an international anti-imperialist organization via public demonstrations, distributing resolutions on various incidents where support was given to colonial groups striving for independence, or gathering financial support (through Münzenberg’s and IAH’s network) LAI had the ambition to be more successful in its support for the colonial world, much more than what the Second International had been able to accomplish, according to the organisers behind the LAI. That is, Münzenberg and the Comintern. This hypothetical discussion shall be thoroughly highlighted as further examination on what kind of practical work the League was doing.

VII. Final Discussion

This text has only touched on certain topics that are connected to the study of the League Against Imperialism. Certain interpretative attempts have been made on specific subjects, but they should be considered as lifting the lid of the LAI box at this stage. The purpose has instead been to introduce a discussion, paint a general picture, and provide with some general guidelines, which are connected to the research project.

The League can be interpreted using different approaches, and writing down and attempting to construct a frame for the study may achieve a proper way of coming to grips with the LAI. I have chosen to leave many of the sections “unfinished” in this working paper, due to the simple fact that the interpretative process, at this moment, still remains open for suggestions. One of the key problems to solve has been to establish a proper disposition in the understanding of the League. My suggestion is that the “life” of the League must be divided in three parts:

1. Establishment/organisation, 1926-29
2. Transformation, 1929-31
3. Decline and liquidation, 1931-35

\(^{68}\) Circular letters to Hasrat Mohani and Maulana Shaukat Ali in India by Louis Gibarti, 9/3-1926. Taken from Barooah, 2004, p. 249, 277.
Another vital aspect in this working paper has been to discuss and introduce the source material gathered in the Comintern archive in Moscow. An example, such as the conflict between Nehru and the International Secretariat in Berlin 1930, is a proof of that. And to demonstrate the character of the material, by suggesting that the League did not only foster political ambitions, it also included individuals who were trying to find their place inside of the Comintern apparat. Individuals such as Hansin Liau, or English Socialist Emile Burns, who worked at the Secretariat in Berlin for a short period, but left after coming into an argument with Münzenberg on political matters.

By constructing an interpretative frame, focusing on the LAI, as attempted in this paper, a deeper and more thorough understanding into what function the League and its network had are possible to make.