

**WILLI
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FORUM

Transnational Networks and Practices of the League against Imperialism

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The League against Imperialism and for National Independence (LAI), established at the “First International Congress against Colonialism and Imperialism” in Brussels on 10-14 February 1927, was a sympathizing communist organization. In Brussels had 174 delegates gathered, representatives of the European inter-war leftwing movement (socialists, radicals, pacifists, intellectuals, and communists), standing side-by-side with anti-colonial activists either living in Europe, or having arrived directly from the colonial and semi-colonial world.

Located in Berlin, the LAI International Secretariat remained active there from 1927 until the ascendancy to power by the Nazi Party (NSDAP) on 30 January 1933, and after the Reichstag Fire on the night of 27 February, the International Secretariat was definitely re-located to, first, Paris, and in September, to London. Existing in Great Britain between 1933 and 1937, the decision was taken by its formal leader, the British socialist Reginald Orlando Bridgeman, to dissolve the LAI and for it to be replaced by the overtly socialist Colonial Information Bureau.

However, the history of the LAI is one characterised by its transnational nature and engagement from a range of global voices, connected either to the history of international communism, or the struggle against colonialism and imperialism, e.g.: Willi Münzenberg, the Indian nationalist revolutionary Virendranath Chattophadyaya, the Chinese communist Hansin Liau, the Japanese communist Teido Kunizaki, the Czechoslovakian communist Bohumíl Smeral, the Hungarian communist Laszlo Dobos/Louis Gibarti, the Turkish communist Bekar Ferdi, the British communist Clemens Dutt, to mention a few examples.

The transnational networks and practices of the LAI were, by and large, determined by internal and external factors. Where the former focuses on the interactionism at the headquarters of the LAI – the International Secretariat – with the national LAI sections, the relations to Comintern headquarters in Moscow, and to the international communist movement (parties and organisations), the latter disclose the interactionism of the LAI with the anti-colonial and left-wing movements, and responded to the antagonism of the Second International (LSI) and national security services on a global scale.

The LAI's transnational practices included a range of activities, aside from sponsoring the establishment of "vigorous" national sections across Europe, the USA and Latin America, where the International Secretariat tried to control the creation and development of a number of propaganda campaigns (Meerut conspiracy trial 1929-33, anti-war campaign 1932, the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition in Paris 1931 etc.), organised courier services from Europe on a global scale, or functioning as an educational centre and curricular institution for anti-colonial activists.

The political heritage of the LAI was a source of inspiration and concerted ambition for the anti-colonial movements in their effort to discuss and enforce a change the global system of colonialism and imperialism after the Second World War in 1945. This implies that the LAI in hindsight became a pivotal actor to push forward the decolonization process, a framework that culminated at the Afro - Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955.

The presentation above on the LAI and its history is based on the scrutiny and analytical assessment of documents located in the Comintern Archive (RGASPI) in Moscow, the Bundesarchiv (SAPMO-BA ZPA) in Lichterfelde, Berlin, the IISG in Amsterdam, the National Archive (Kew Gardens) in London, Riksarkivet in Stockholm, and the Stockholm City Archive (SCA). A thorough investigation on the LAI and its history is presented in Fredrik Petersson's doctoral dissertation "We Are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers". Willi Münzenberg, the League against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925 - 1933 (Åbo Akademi University, 2013). The study traces back the LAI's genealogy with the establishment of the Hands off China campaign in Germany 1925, organised through and by Münzenberg's and IAH's initiative, leading on to the Against the Cruelties in Syria Committee (1925) and the formation of the League against Colonial Oppression (Liga gegen koloniale Unterdrückung; LACO) in Berlin on 10 February 1926, thus, the LAI and the Brussels Congress was the culmination of Münzenberg's anti-colonial project, which in turn spurred the creation of an international anti-imperialist organisation.

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