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Anarchist Anti-Imperialism

Guy Aldred and the Indian Revolutionary
Movement, 1909–14

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Retrieved on 31st March 2021 from www.tandfonline.com
Published in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth
History*, pp. 286–303

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

15 February 2018

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Abstract

This article examines the British anarchist Guy Aldred's involvement in the Indian revolutionary movement from 1909 to 1914 in order to reflect on solidarities and antagonisms between anarchism and anti-colonial movements in the early twentieth century. Drawing on Aldred's writings, court material and intelligence reports, it explores, first, his decision to print the suppressed Indian nationalist periodical *The Indian Sociologist* in August 1909 and, second, his involvement in Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's disputed arrest and deportation, which was brought to the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague in October 1910. In spite of recent attempts by historians to bring the Indian revolutionary movement into much closer conjunction with anarchism than previously assumed, Aldred's engagement with the Indian freedom struggle has escaped sustained historical attention. Addressing this silence, the article argues that Aldred's anti-imperialism was rooted in his anarchist visions of freedom, including freedom of the press, and reveals a more unusual concern with the question of colonialism than shown by almost any other British anarchist in the early twentieth century. At the same time, it cautions that Aldred was blind to the problems of Indian nationalism, especially the Hindu variety espoused by Savarkar, which leaves his anarchist anti-imperialism much compromised.

In November 2015, the benchers of the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple decided to reinstate the former Indian lawyer and nationalist Shyamaji Krishnavarma 'in recognition of the fact that the cause of Indian home rule, for which he fought, was not incompatible with membership of the bar and that by modern standards he did not receive an entirely

fair hearing'.¹ As an advocate of non-parliamentarian anti-colonial nationalism, Krishnavarma was the founder of the Indian revolutionary movement in Britain; in the space of six months in 1905, he set up scholarships for Indian students to study in Britain, the penny monthly *The Indian Sociologist*, the Indian Home Rule Society and India House, a hostel for Indian students in London.² Throughout its five-year existence, India House became a centre for numerous Indian nationalists such as Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, V. V. S. Aiyar, M. P. T. Acharya, Lala Har Dayal and Madan Lal Dhingra. Leading socialists Henry Mayers Hyndman, a long-time supporter of the Indian nationalists in Britain, and Keir Hardie, the Labour MP, as well as anarchists Thomas Keell, editor and printer of the Freedom Group's monthly publication *Freedom*, and Guy A. Aldred, editor and printer of the publication *The Herald of Revolt*, also passed through the hostel.³

In February and March 1909, Krishnavarma published a number of letters in *The Times* newspaper, in which he defended the killing of British officials and innocent bystanders because 'those who habitually live and associate with wrongdoers or robbers [and Indian Nationalists regard all Englishmen in India as robbers] do so at their own peril'.⁴ Furthermore, a public quarrel in *The Times* with Chattopadhyaya over leadership of the exiled Indians and revolutionary methods attracted unwanted attention from the Inner Temple, which

¹ Inner Temple press statement, 'Shyamji Krishna Varma', 9 Nov. 2015.

² Krishnavarma was a millionaire and had made a fortune from investments in cotton mills in India and the stock exchanges in Paris and Geneva, enabling him to bankroll these initiatives. See Fischer-Tiné, *Shyamji Krishnavarma*, 56–57.

³ For more on India House, see Fischer-Tiné, 'Indian Nationalism'; Owen, 'The Soft Heart of the British Empire'; Tickell, 'Scholarship Terrorists'.

⁴ Krishnavarma, 'Indian Anarchism in England', 6, square brackets in original.

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subsequently decided to disbar Krishnavarma on 30 April 1909.⁵ As another consequence of his public defence of political assassination, Krishnavarma found himself in need of a new printer for *The Indian Sociologist*. In April 1909, he asked Thomas Keell whether he would take on this printing. But Keell’s estimate was too high so Krishnavarma instead approached Twentieth Century Press, which also printed the Social Democratic Federation’s paper *Justice*, edited by Henry Mayers Hyndman.

However, the contract eventually went to Arthur Fletcher Horsley, whom Krishnavarma had also contacted three years earlier but was otherwise not connected to the Indians in London, and he printed the May, June and July issues.⁶

In the July 1909 issue of *The Indian Sociologist*, Krishnavarma repeated his defence of political murder, writing that

[a]t the risk of alienating the sympathies and good opinion of almost all our old friends and acquaintances in England and some of our past helpmates in India, we repeat that political assassination is not murder, and that the rightful employment of physical force connotes ‘force used defensively against force used aggressively’ as aptly expressed by the late Auberon Herbert in his Herbert Spencer Lecture at Oxford in 1906.⁷

When former India House-resident Madan Lal Dhingra assassinated political *aide-de-camp* Sir William Hutt Curzon Wylie on the front steps of the Imperial Institute at an ‘At Home’

⁵ Chattopadhyaya, ‘Indian Anarchism in England,’ 6; Krishnavarma, ‘Indian Anarchism,’ 10; Bench Table Orders (BEN), 1/24/33, 14 Jan 1908–14 Dec 1911, Inner Temple Archives.

⁶ Weekly Report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence, 24 April 1909 and 8 June 1909, India Office Records hereafter (IOR), British Library (hereafter BL); see also Shah, ‘The Indian Sociologist’; Laursen, ‘The Indian Nationalist Press’.

⁷ Krishnavarma, ‘A Brief Statement,’ 25.

event organised by the National Indian Association on 1 July 1909, Krishnavarma's premonitory defence of political assassination naturally brought *The Indian Sociologist* and the India House group even further into the spotlight of the Special Branch of the Department of Criminal Intelligence at Scotland Yard. While Krishnavarma edited the publication from Paris, where he had resided since June 1907 and could therefore not be prosecuted, Horsley was immediately arrested and charged with printing seditious material. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to four months in prison.⁸

Upon hearing that the government had suppressed *The Indian Sociologist* and charged Horsley with sedition, Aldred contacted Krishnavarma in late July 1909 and offered to print the periodical with the Bakunin Press, which he had set up with Charles Lahr in 1907. Krishnavarma responded that 'I approve of your idea of reprinting portions of the prosecuted numbers of my paper and the reprinted portions with any remarks you may make thereon may be circulated along with *The Indian Sociologist* without mention that it is a supplement'.⁹ Aldred printed the August 1909 issue, in which Krishnavarma reiterated that 'political assassination is not murder' and, defending Dhingra, wrote 'I frankly admit I approve of the deed, and regard its author as a martyr in the cause of Indian independence'.¹⁰ As had happened to Horsley, Aldred was arrested on 25 August 1909 and appeared at the Bow Street Police Court two days later, charged with 'having unlawfully printed, published and caused to be printed and published, a certain scandalous and seditious libel in the form of a printed publication called the "Indian Sociologist" dated

⁸ July 1909, trial of HORSLEY, Arthur Fletcher (printer), (t19090719-54), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.2, 10 March 2016.

⁹ Aldred, 'Author's Trial for Sedition', 25.

¹⁰ Krishnavarma, 'Indian Martyrdom in England', 29.

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published a special double number of his paper *The Word Quarterly*, in which he asserted that 'I was concerned about Veer Savarkar whom I deemed to be a greater patriot than Gandhi; a true martyr for Indian Freedom'.⁷⁸

174, BL.

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⁷⁸ Aldred, 'Gandhi, Pacifism, and India', 4.

August 1909'.¹¹ At the trial on 7 September 1909, Aldred was found guilty and sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment as a first-class misdemeanant.[12]

In the wake of Dhingra's assassination of Curzon Wylie, the Department of Criminal Intelligence increased surveillance of India House and tried to pin the murder on Vinayak Savarkar, the leader of the Indian nationalists in London.

Vinayak's brother Ganesh had been arrested in India in early June 1909 for publishing seditious literature, and was tried under Sections 121, 121A and 124A of the Indian Penal Code. On 8 June 1909, Ganesh Savarkar was found guilty and sentenced to transportation for life. The Department of Criminal Intelligence believed that the murder of Curzon Wylie had been orchestrated by Vinayak Savarkar to avenge his brother's deportation.¹² To avoid arrest, Savarkar fled to Paris in January 1910 and joined the exiled revolutionaries in the Paris Indian Society. On 22 February 1910, acting on a warrant issued from the Bombay High Court on 8 February, the Bow Street Police Court issued a warrant for Savarkar's arrest under Sections 121, 121A and 124A of the Indian Penal Code, charged with sedition and waging war against the king, collecting of arms and abetment of murder, as well as his involvement in the Nasik Conspiracy Case, which all came within the Fugitive Offenders' Act of 1881.¹³ Despite warnings from his compatriots in Paris, Savarkar returned to London on 13 March 1910, and he was immediately arrested upon his arrival at Victoria Station.¹⁴

¹¹ 'SEDITION: Guy Alfred Aldred: subversive publications and activities', HO 144/22508, The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA), 12. September 1909, trial of ALDRED, Guy Alfred (22, publisher) (t19090907-44), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.2, 11 March 2016.

¹² Government of Bombay, Source Material, 437–40; Weekly Report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence, 17 July 1909 and 31 July 1909, IOR, BL.

¹³ For more on the sedition charges against Savarkar, see Bakhle, 'Savarkar (1883–1966)'.

¹⁴ Padmanabhan, V. V. S. Aiyar, 73.

Temporarily held in Brixton Prison, it was decided that, because he was to be tried under the Indian Penal Code, he should stand trial in India. Savarkar embarked the SS *Morea*, a P&O mail ship, on 1 July 1910, and, as the ship lay outside Marseilles a week later, he managed to escape through a porthole and swim onto French territory, where he approached a policeman and claimed asylum. However, the policeman returned him to the British authorities on the *Morea*, and the vessel with Savarkar on board reached Bombay on 22 July 1910.¹⁵ The Indian nationalists and their allies immediately claimed that Savarkar's return to the British authorities was in violation of French asylum laws as well as international laws, and they took the case to the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague on 25 October 1910.¹⁶ Meanwhile, Aldred was released from prison on 2 July 1910—two months of his sentence being remitted—and immediately set up the Savarkar Release Committee.¹⁷ Throughout the next four years, Aldred advocated Savarkar's case in his paper *The Herald of Revolt* and became increasingly involved in the Indian revolutionary struggle for independence, striking up long-lasting friendships with some of the Indian nationalists.¹⁸

Drawing on essays from *The Indian Sociologist*, *The Herald of Revolt* and Aldred's autobiographical writings as well as court material and intelligence reports, this article examines Aldred's involvement with the Indian revolutionary movement from 1909 to 1914 and explores, first, his decision to print

¹⁵ File 3823, IOR/L/PJ/6/1039, BL.

¹⁶ For instance, the International Socialist Congress held in Copenhagen in August 1910 passed a 'Resolution on Right of Asylum' in protest at Savarkar's arrest on French soil.

Simons, *Report of Socialist Party Delegation*.

¹⁷ 'SEDITION: Guy Alfred Aldred: subversive publications and activities', HO 144/22508, TNA.

¹⁸ A Home Office file on Aldred notes that '[s]ince 1909 Aldred has been prominently associated with the Indian Revolutionary party in London'. 'Guy A. Aldred', KV 2/792, TNA.

solidarity with anti-colonial movements. While Aldred stayed in touch with both Har Dayal and Acharya, especially after Acharya had turned to anarchism, it is his involvement with Har Dayal and Savarkar that reveals the most about his anarchist anti-imperialism.⁷⁵

At an India House meeting in October 1908, Har Dayal espoused anti-Muslim sentiments, arguing that he was working for a 'Hindu India', which caused some protest. Savarkar, for instance, protested that such remarks were 'dangerous to the National movement'.⁷⁶ However, Savarkar would later repeat the same exclusionist Hindu nationalist claims and fully develop this ideology in his pamphlet *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1923).⁷⁷ Such forms of nationalism were difficult to reconcile with the internationalist principles of the mainstream anarchist movement. For all his good intentions and challenges to the anarchists in Britain, in other words, Aldred's support of Har Dayal and Savarkar, in particular, reveals tensions arising from his praxis that, ultimately, made him unable to detach anarchist anti-imperialism from nationalist anti-anarchism. And yet, while Aldred was not a typical anarchist, his repeated appeals to the wider anarchist community in Britain suggest that his story has wider importance for our understanding of the history of anarchism as well as the historiography of the Indian revolutionary movement in Britain. As a final testament to the contradiction in Aldred's anarchist vision, in the wake of Savarkar's involvement in the Gandhi murder trial in 1950, he

⁷⁵ M. P. T. Acharya's turn to anarchism remains underexplored, but see Meltzer, *The Anarchists in London*; Subramanyam, *M. P. T. Acharya*; file 7997/23, IOR/L/PJ/12/

⁷⁶ See, for instance, Weekly Report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence, 10 Oct. 1908, IOR, BL; for more on Har Dayal and Hindu nationalism, see Brown, *Har Dayal*, 230–32.

⁷⁷ See, for instance, Weekly Report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence, 23 Jan. 1909 and 20 April 1909, IOR, BL; Savarkar, *Hindutva*; for more on Savarkar and Hindu nationalism, see Banerjee, *Make Me a Man!*, 50–74; Noorani, *Savarkar and Hindutva*, 48–60.

and subscribed to *The Herald of Revolt*.⁷¹ On 25 March 1914, Har Dayal was arrested on charges of being ‘an anarchist’ and thereby liable for deportation. However, he was released on bail two days later and fled to Switzerland, where he joined Chempakaraman Pillai, Strickland, Krishnavarma and others in the International Pro-India Committee.⁷² Aldred was probably unaware of Har Dayal’s escape because in the May 1914 issue of *The Herald of Revolt* he urged that, ‘unless a strong international demand for his release goes up from the working class, he is liable to share the same fate meted out to Savarkar in 1910’.⁷³ Aldred’s defence of Har Dayal was his last sustained involvement with the Indian nationalists for a while and he instead turned his attention to anti-militarism, opposition to conscription and the impending war. As a consequence of campaigning against conscription, he was imprisoned and interned several times during the war and, as Rose Witcop assumed the responsibility of publishing *The Spur*, attention to the Indian nationalist struggle for independence waned.⁷⁴

Epilogue and Conclusion

Aldred’s involvement with the Indian nationalists was unique in the early twentieth century and reveals a more unusual concern with the question of Indian anti-colonialism than shown by almost any other British anarchist in that era.

Moreover, it represents a unique praxis of anarchist anti-imperialism based on the principles of freedom and duty to act, despite its nationalist character, rather than a position of

⁷¹ See ‘Letter from Har Dayal to Van Wyck Brooks’, 6 March 1914, South Asian American Digital Archive, <https://www.saada.org/item/20111127-479> for Har Dayal’s sub-cription, see *The Herald of Revolt*, 4, 1 (Jan. 1914): 19.

⁷² Brown, *Har Dayal*, 171; Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny*, 96–100.

⁷³ Aldred, ‘Stop This Infamy!’, 45–47.

⁷⁴ Walter, ‘Guy A. Aldred (1886–1963)’, 84–85.

The Indian Sociologist and, second, his involvement with the Savarkar case in the light of his anarchist principle of freedom. Aldred had contributed two pieces on the Denshawai incident in Egypt to *Justice* in 1906, an essay on French colonialism in Algeria to *The Voice of Labour* in 1907 and took a general interest in the colonial question, writing several pieces on Ireland and South Africa in *The Herald of Revolt* as well.¹⁹ However, between 1909 and 1914, he published 18 essays on British imperialism in India and it was through his engagement with the Indian nationalists that he most clearly articulated what I term ‘anarchist anti-imperialism’. This involved a praxis of actively defending the Indians’ right to free speech, grounded in his anarchist belief in freedom and duty to act, rather than adopting a position of solidarity. In fact, I suggest that Aldred’s anarchist vision of freedom is central to his engagement with the Indian nationalists and reveals a more unusual concern with the question of Indian anti-colonialism than shown by almost any other British anarchist in the early twentieth century. In other words, it says much about the limitations of British anarchists’ understanding of anti-colonial struggles as they often rejected such aspirations because of their nationalist character. This was exemplified, paradoxically, by Aldred’s partner Rose Witcop, who dismissed the Indian nationalists’ struggles as ‘merely the efforts of rising intellectuals to a dangerous establishment of Nationalism and a bourgeois republic’.²⁰ Whereas anarchists in Britain, in principle, were sympathetic to anti-colonial independence struggles, Aldred’s involvement with the Indian nationalists suggests rather a praxis of anarchist anti-imperialism. This was based on his belief that, whether or not their values corresponded, socialists had a duty to support anti-colonial

¹⁹ Aldred, ‘Truth about the Denshawai Incident’, 3; Aldred, ‘Sir E. Grey and the Denshawai Incident’, 2–3; Aldred, ‘Algeria’, 38; Aldred, ‘Ireland’, 26–27; Aldred, ‘The South African Conquest’, 127, 139.

²⁰ Aldred, *No Traitor’s Gait*, 423.

nationalist struggles for self-determination to fight common enemies. In other words, the nationalist character of Indian anti-colonialism, for Aldred, was less important than the anti-imperial principle of freedom for oppressed peoples. However, in adopting this praxis and engagement with the Indian nationalists, he was almost blind to the problems of Indian nationalism, especially the Hindu variety espoused by Savarkar and Har Dayal. Ultimately, I suggest in the epilogue, this myopia leaves Aldred's anarchist anti-imperialism much compromised.

What is more, I caution that, while Aldred sympathised with the Indian struggle for freedom, only a few of the Indian revolutionaries, such as Har Dayal and Acharya, embraced anarchist ideologies and remained friends with Aldred.²¹ Krishnavarma, on the other hand, emphatically stated that, 'as the goal of the Indian Nationalists is to form a National Government in the place of the present alien despotism, the words "anarchy" and "anarchists" cannot possibly have any application in the present case'.²² Indeed, while Krishnavarma was inspired by the libertarianism of Herbert Spencer and Auberon Herbert in his articulation of anti-colonialism and violent resistance, the Indian nationalists had little direct contact with British anarchists, let alone other prominent exiled anarchists such as Peter Kropotkin, Rudolf Rocker or Errico Malatesta, who were all living in exile in Britain in the early twentieth century. An examination of Aldred's involvement with the Indian nationalists, in other words, opens a window onto the Indian revolutionary movement in Britain and illuminates the anarchists' ambivalence towards the cause of independence.

In pursuing these arguments, this article enters into critical dialogue with recent scholarly attempts to bring the history of Indian anti-colonialism into much closer conjunction with

²¹ Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits*, 153.

²² Krishnavarma, 'Anarchy Defined', 34.

support and the Savarkar Release Committee amassed only a few pounds altogether.

In a last effort to garner support, Aldred published a 'Savarkar Issue' of *The Herald of Revolt* in October 1912. He repeated many of the claims from previous issues of his paper and remarked that 'Savarkar's immediate release must be insisted upon with the same fervour, the same unwavering determination as that with which we demanded Malatesta's salvation from an Italian dungeon'.⁶⁹ The issue also contained pieces by Strickland and Henry Sara as well as an excerpt from Savarkar's banned history *The Indian War of Independence of 1857* (1909), which had been prepared during Savarkar's tenure at India House and was used as evidence of sedition in the court case. As before, the special issue did not have any significant impact on the anarchist communities in Britain. It was, however, proscribed in India under section 19 of the Sea Customs Act of 1878.⁷⁰ The 'Savarkar Issue' was Aldred's last involvement with the Savarkar case, and he now planned for the cessation of *The Herald of Revolt* to be succeeded by *The Spur*.

In the last issue of *The Herald of Revolt*, however, Aldred returned to his support of the Indian nationalists. After Savarkar's transportation to the Andaman Islands in 1911, the Indian revolutionary movement abroad largely shifted from Europe to North America, where India House alumnus Har Dayal became involved with the San Francisco branch of the Industrial Workers of the World and was one of the co-founders of the Ghadar Party in late May 1913. Despite his relocation to the US, Har Dayal stayed in contact with Aldred

⁶⁹ Aldred, 'The Savarkar Conspiracy', 101.

⁷⁰ Aldred, 'Proscribed in India', 7; 'List of publications proscribed under section 19 of the Sea Customs Act of 1878, file 6050, IOR/L/PJ/6/1624, BL.

he was found guilty and sentenced to three months in prison and recommended for deportation under the Aliens Act.⁶⁶

The Malatesta Release Committee was immediately set up to protest the sentence and stop the deportation order. Jack Tanner was the initial secretary and treasurer, but Aldred soon replaced him in that role. The committee successfully roused public opinion and organised a demonstration at Trafalgar Square on 9 June 1912, the day before Malatesta's appeal hearing, with speakers such as James MacDonald, Guy Bowman, James Tochatti, Guy Aldred and Tom Mann. Malatesta's appeal was rejected the next day. However, on 18 June, Home Secretary Reginald McKenna decided not to make an expulsion order against Malatesta, but his prison sentence was not remitted.⁶⁷ The committee continued to agitate for Malatesta's release and, in July 1912, Silvio Corio of the committee approached Krishnavarma, asked for financial help and mentioned Aldred as a friend of Malatesta. Krishnavarma donated £1 to the Malatesta Fund, but made it clear that he did not know Malatesta personally.

Nevertheless, the donation prompted Aldred to remark that:

seeing that our Anarchist friends have appealed to Mr. Krishnavarma to help Malatesta's cause, surely they will now see the common decency of joining in the outcry against the treatment meted out to Savarkar, Mr. Krishnavarma's compatriot. Up to now they have preserved a sullen silence in this case.⁶⁸

Despite Aldred's challenge to the anarchists in Britain to take up Savarkar's case, he failed to attract any considerable

⁶⁶ Trial of MALATESTA, Errico (59, publisher) (t19120514-46), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.2, 09 April 2016.

⁶⁷ Di Paola, *Knights Errant of Anarchy*, 146–51.

⁶⁸ Aldred, 'Malatesta Fund', 78.

anarchism than previously assumed.²³ While I applaud such much-needed efforts to decolonise anarchist socialism, there is also reason to challenge the British anarchists' relation to the colonial question and bring to light histories of antagonism and incompatibility. In other words, an assessment of Aldred's anarchist anti-imperialism sheds light on the fraught relationship between anarchism and anti-colonialism in early twentieth-century Britain. To investigate this thoroughly, after a brief biographical outline of Aldred's early years, the article proceeds to discuss his position on the British left as a non-aligned anarchist-communist and staunch defender of the freedom of the press, before examining his involvement with the Indian nationalists.

Youth in Revolt: Socialism, Anarchism and Freedom of the Press

Born on 5 November 1886, Aldred was raised by his mother in Clerkenwell, London. They lived with her parents, and Aldred's grandfather Charles Holds-worth, a bookbinder who had supported Dadabhai Naoroji's nationalist efforts in the late nineteenth century, exerted a particularly potent influence on him, stimulating his interest in India.²⁴ Brought up as an evangelical Christian, his first publication 'The Last Days: Peace or War' (1902) was in the cause of Christian pacifist opposition to the Boer War. However, by 1904 he had abandoned religion, but retained his mission to preach, often through letters to the press. In November 1904, he began writing for the *Agnostic Journal*, a free-thought weekly edited by William Stewart Ross. At the journal's offices in Farringdon Road, he met the Scottish radical journalist John

²³ Laursen, 'Bomb Plot of Zürich'; Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*; Ramnath, *Decolonizing Anarchism*; Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny*; Oberoi, 'Ghadar Movement'.

²⁴ Aldred, *No Traitor's Gait*, 36.

Morrison Davidson and was introduced to the lives of Charles Bradlaugh, a vocal supporter of the Indian National Congress, and Richard Carlile, a defender of freedom of the press.²⁵ Carlile, in particular, had a profound impact on Aldred's anarchist vision of freedom. However, according to Aldred's autobiography *No Traitor's Gait*, it was after hearing Daniel de Leon speak at Clerkenwell Green in 1904 that he became interested in politics, and he joined the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) in March 1905.²⁶

Henry Mayers Hyndman had established the SDF in 1881 and, until it merged with other socialist groups to form the British Socialist Party in 1911, it was 'the major British representative of Marxism'.²⁷ Although he was a supporter of the moderate Indian nationalist Dadabhai Naoroji and the Indian National Congress, Hyndman often advocated more radical methods against the British in India. He opened Krishnavarma's India House on 1 July 1905, remarking that 'loyalty to Great Britain means treachery to India', and frequently addressed the question of colonialism in the SDF's paper *Justice*.²⁸ Aldred applied his journalistic talents to writing for *Justice* and the *Social Democrat*, but resigned from the party in September 1906 following disagreements over the SDF's support of Socialist Sunday Schools.²⁹ However, it is likely that Aldred first became aware of the Indian nationalists in London through Hyndman.

By the end of 1906, Aldred gravitated towards anti-parliamentary communism and approached the Freedom Group, established by Peter Kropotkin in 1886. In addition to publishing *Freedom*, members John Turner, Alfred Marsh and Thomas Keell produced the syndicalist weekly *The Voice of*

²⁵ Walter, 'Guy A. Aldred (1886–1963)', 77–79.

²⁶ Aldred, *No Traitor's Gait*, 111–12.

²⁷ Crick, *History*, 8, 13.

²⁸ 'Opening of "India House"', 31; 'Mr Hyndman', 31.

²⁹ Caldwell, *Come Dungeons Dark*, 41.

What is more, trying to garner support for the case, he remarked that '[h]ad the French and English proletariat also known the secret history of the negotiations that had passed, the storms of indignant protest would never have been silenced by the promise of arbitration'.⁶² As Aldred covered the case closely in *The Herald of Revolt* in the next two years, his paper reproduced a clip-ping from the Swiss-based International Pro-India Committee's organ *Der Wanderer*, possibly with assistance from Krishnavarma who was on the board of the organisation, making reference to Aldred's article 'The Savarkar Infamy' in *The Freewoman*.⁶³ Moreover, his paper carried several stories of how anarchist publications such as *Le Société Nouvelle* in Belgium and *Le Libertaire* in France had taken up Savarkar's case, challenging British anarchists to do the same.⁶⁴

Aldred's frustration with the silence of anarchists in Britain became more pronounced in the summer of 1912. In April 1912, in the midst of the Italo-Turkish war, Enrico Ennio Bellelli spread rumours that the well-known anarchist Errico Malatesta was a spy for the Turkish. In response, Malatesta argued that, among the Italian anarchist diaspora in Britain, many had long considered Bellelli a spy for the British. Bellelli initially withdrew his accusations, but instead took Malatesta to court for criminal libel.⁶⁵ Malatesta appeared at the Central Criminal Court of England and Wales on 14 May 1912, where

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Aldred, 'Our Savarkar Protest', 83; Aldred, 'The Savarkar Infamy', 113–14; *Der Wanderer: Volkstümliche Zeitschrift für Kulturelle und Humanitäre Bestrebungen* was the official organ of the International Pro-India Committee, formed in Zürich in June 1912 by Chempakaraman Pillai with Krishnavarma and Strickland on board, until it was replaced by the paper *Pro India: Monatsschrift des Internationalen Komitees Pro India* in 1914.

⁶⁴ Aldred, 'Our Indian Exposures', 18; Aldred, 'Jailed till Christmas, 1960', 119–20.

⁶⁵ Di Paola, *Knights Errant of Anarchy*, 146.

not be restored by His Britannic Majesty's Government to the Government of the French Republic'.⁵⁷ Given concern that the arbitration at The Hague might interfere with the Bombay magistrate's case against Savarkar, the proceedings went ahead and, on 24 December 1910, Savarkar was sentenced to transportation for life for his involvement in the Nasik conspiracy and, on 3 February 1911, he received another sentence of transportation for life for 'abetment of murder'.⁵⁸

Upon his release in early July 1910, Aldred set up the Savarkar Release Committee and published a leaflet 'To the English Proletariat', in which he claimed that 'The English proceedings—at the Bow Street Police Court, the Divisional Court and the Court of Appeal—were characterised by the usual illegality'.⁵⁹

On 24 February 1911, the Permanent Court of Arbitration decided that 'the Government of His Britannic Majesty is not required to restore the said VINAYAK DAMODAR SAVARKAR to the Government of the French Republic'.⁶⁰ In the next issue of *The Herald of Revolt*, Aldred immediately blamed the French prime minister Aristide Briand for surrendering Savarkar and 'voluntarily betray[ing] the Sovereignty of France' and argued that, because Savarkar was transported on the SS *Morea*, a private vessel, his entry into French waters constituted an 'invasion of France' or, at least, 'an infringement of the right of asylum'.⁶¹ In typical polemical fashion, Aldred proceeded to challenge the legality of Savarkar's return to the British authorities and the sedition charges brought against him.

⁵⁷ 'Agreement between the United Kingdom and France, Referring to Arbitration the Case of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar', 25 Oct. 1910, <http://www.haguejusticeportal.net/index.php?id=7283>.

⁵⁸ Government of Bombay, *Source Material*, 456–63.

⁵⁹ Excerpt reprinted in Aldred, 'The Savarkar Case', 51.

⁶⁰ 'Arrest and Return of Savarkar, France v. Great Britain', 24 Feb. 1911, <http://www.haguejusticeportal.net/index.php?id=7283>.

⁶¹ Aldred, 'Briand Surrenders Savarkar', 9, italics in original.

Labour from January 1907. Aldred contributed to all 30 issues of this publication under his own name or as Ajax Junior, and his involvement with the Freedom Group brought him into the spotlight of the Department of Criminal Intelligence.³⁰ At a benefit meeting for The Voice of Labour at the Workers' Friend Club in Jubilee Street in February 1907, he met Rose Witcop, the sister of Milly Witcop, Rudolf Rocker's partner. Aldred formed an open relationship with Rose, which, as Maia Ramnath has noted, later sealed the friendship with Har Dayal, who shared similar beliefs in free love.³¹ As a critic of orthodox Marxism as well as what he saw as Kropotkin's theoretical anarchism, Aldred split with the Freedom Group in favour of direct action and, in need of a political propaganda organ, set up the Bakunin Press with Charles Lahr. Aldred's rejection of both Marxism and anarchism, as promulgated through groups and organisations, has made it difficult to place him within any political tradition in Britain. However, I suggest that his attempt to 'bridge the gap between Marxism and anarchism', to paraphrase Ruth Kinna, and articulate a non-aligned position on the British left allowed him to engage with the question of Indian nationalism on his own terms.³² It is from this position 'as an activist and Bakunist', as Kinna has argued, that Aldred developed the two outstanding themes of his socialism: 'duty and freedom'.³³

Aldred's commitment to freedom included freedom of the press, and he modelled himself as an advocate of the free press in the tradition of Richard Carlile, the 'single-eyed prophet of liberty ... who had the honour of vindicating the freedom of

³⁰ Ibid., 43; Weekly Report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence, 15 Sept. 1909, IOR, BL.

³¹ Caldwell, *Come Dungeons Dark*, 54–55; Ramnath, *Decolonizing Anarchism*, 108; see also Frost, 'Love is Always Free', 73–94.

³² Kinna, 'Guy Aldred: Bridging the Gap', 110.

³³ Kinna, 'Guy Aldred: Rebel', <http://www.berfrois.com/2011/09/ruth-kinna-on-guy-aldred/>.

the Press'.³⁴ Whereas Kropotkin called William Godwin 'the father of English Anarchism', Aldred ranked him as inferior to Carlile, who was 'practical Anarchist in his outlook on social ordinances—almost Communist in his recognition of the class-war existent in society'.³⁵ It is this link between anarchism and freedom of the press that lies behind the logic of printing *The Indian Sociologist*, but Aldred also extended that freedom to include freedom from British imperialism. In fact, in the foreword to *No Traitor's Gait*, he wrote that 'a kind of common completeness links Savarkar and myself with [Richard] Carlile. We are the corner stones that the builders of the temple have despised and rejected'.³⁶

Anarchism, Freedom of the Press and *The Indian Sociologist*

Rejecting what he saw as theoretical Marxism and anarchism and, in the process, alienating many friends on the British left, Aldred earned the nick-name 'the guy they all dread'. Against the theoreticians, Aldred instead engaged in direct action and developed a form of socialism that was both practical and anti-imperialist.³⁷ According to one biographer of Savarkar, in March 1909 Aldred brought V. I. Lenin to India House, where three to four meetings occurred between Savarkar and Lenin, and Dhingra was present at one of them.³⁸ However, there are no other records of such meetings taking place, but the Department of Criminal Intelligence reported that many Indians frequented Tom Keell's offices during April.³⁹ While

³⁴ Aldred, *Richard Carlile*, 6, 11.

³⁵ Aldred, *Socialism and Parliament*, 51; Aldred, *Richard Carlile*, 6.

³⁶ Aldred, *No Traitor's Gait*, 1.

³⁷ Meltzer, *I Couldn't Paint*, 59; Walter, 'Guy A. Aldred (1886–1963)', 82.

³⁸ Srivastava, *Five Stormy Years*, 141.

³⁹ Weekly Report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence, 24 April 1909,

IOR, BL.

Krishnavarma and regular contributor to *The Indian Sociologist*. Strickland donated £10 to Aldred's Savarkar Release Committee, initiating a long friendship between them, and he became a regular contributor to *The Herald of Revolt*, in which he discussed Savarkar's case and the Indian struggle for.⁵⁴ When Strickland died in 1938 he left a fortune to Aldred, which allowed him to continue publishing his later periodical *The Word*.⁵⁵

Aldred's defence of freedom of the press on behalf of the Indian nationalists in Britain, I suggest, reveals a praxis of anarchist anti-imperialism that was central to his understanding of freedom but also, in this epistemology, ideologically flawed as he, in doing so, implicitly supported other oppressions internally in the Indian struggle for independence. This became even clearer when Aldred involved himself in the agitation for Savarkar's release.

Aldred and the Savarkar Case

While Aldred was in prison, the events of the Savarkar case unfolded. On 21 December 1909, A. M. T. Jackson, the tax collector of Nasik, was shot dead by Anant Laxman Kanhere, allegedly with a Browning pistol procured by Savarkar in London. In addition to charges of abetment of murder, Savarkar faced allegations of sedition made in speeches in 1906.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, his spectacular escape and re-arrest in France postponed the trial, and the ensuing case between Britain and France ended up at the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague on 25 October 1910 to decide if Savarkar should, 'in conformity with the rules of international law, be restored or

⁵⁴ For Strickland's donation, see 'Savarkar! The Hindu Patriot', 83.

⁵⁵ Walter, 'Guy A. Aldred (1886–1963)', 90; Fischer-Tiné, *Shyamji Krishnavarma*, 76–77.

⁵⁶ Government of Bombay, *Source Material*, 442.

Signalling Aldred's solitary position among the British anarchists, he remarked that 'volunteers are needed for that fight'.⁴⁸ No volunteers emerged, though, and Georges Pagnier in Paris printed the next issue of *The Indian Sociologist*.⁴⁹

As predicted, Aldred was arrested and stood trial at the Central Criminal Court of England and Wales on 7 September 1909, where he was found guilty and sentenced to 12 months in prison. While waiting to serve his time, he was still seen in the company of Nitisen Dwarkadas, V. V. S. Aiyar and Sukh Sagar Dutt, among others.⁵⁰ Aldred later wrote in his autobiography that 'I was deserted by the entire Socialist and Anarchist movement. No Hindu would identify himself with me', but he did receive some support.⁵¹ For instance, Rudolf Rocker actually backed his case in *Der Arbeiter Fraynd* and the Indian nationalists, of course, were appreciative of his support.⁵² Har Dayal noted in the Paris-based publication *Bande Mataram* that

[w]e wish to express our sincere appreciation of the bravery and love of humanity displayed by our brother, Mr. Aldred, who has been imprisoned in London for printing 'The Indian Sociologist'. Such men are the salt of the earth. Young Indians should profit by example of this righteous man who is suffering for the sake of human progress.⁵³

Importantly, it also attracted the interest of the so-called 'Anarchist Baron' Walter Strickland, who was a close ally of

⁴⁸ Aldred, 'Sedition!', 31.

⁴⁹ *The Indian Sociologist*, Sept. 1909, 40.

⁵⁰ Weekly Report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence, 4 Oct. 1909, IOR, BL.

⁵¹ Aldred, *No Traitor's Gait*, 423–24.

⁵² Weekly Report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence, 30 Aug. 1910, IOR, BL.

⁵³ Har Dayal, 'Guy Alfred Aldred', 4.

Keell and Aldred were no longer working together, the Indians may have heard of Aldred's press through Keell, and by the summer of 1909 the exchanges between the anarchists and the Indian nationalists in Britain were more frequent than before, leading to Aldred's printing and publication of the August 1909 issue of *The Indian Sociologist*.

That issue contained the usual four pages written by Krishnavarma and four pages added by Aldred. Krishnavarma wrote that 'the name of Madan Lal Dhingra [*sic*], will go down to posterity, as that of one who sacrificed his life, by remaining faithful to the altar of his ideals' and, proclaiming Dhingra a 'martyr in the cause of Indian Independence', he proposed to set up four new scholarships named after him.⁴⁰ Moreover, responding to Madame Daniel Lesueur's accusations of 'Indian anarchism' in the French publication *Le Temps*, Krishnavarma quoted from Robert Hunter and Charles Morris's definition of 'Anarchism' in *The Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (1896) and reiterated that

the phrase, 'Les Anarchist Hindous', as applied to Indian patriots, has no meaning, since the word anarchy, as generally understood in Europe and America, means absence of government, or 'a social theory, which would do away with all authority, except that sanctioned by conviction, and which is intended to secure individual liberty against the encroachments of the State'.⁴¹

As the Indian nationalists wanted to establish a national government, the label 'anarchist', he repeated, had no meaning in

⁴⁰ Krishnavarma, 'Indian Martyrdom in England', 29; these scholarships were awarded the next month, see Krishnavarma, 'Martyr Dhingra Scholarships', 37.

⁴¹ Krishnavarma, 'No Anarchists', 35; Hunter and Morris, *The Encyclopaedic Dictionary*, 203.

this context. However, despite Krishnavarma's rejection of the label 'anarchist', he was happy to receive any support in the struggle for Indian independence, suggesting that the Indian revolutionary movement was less ideologically coherent, but more willing to embrace Machiavellian tactics in attempts to overthrow the British Empire.

Conversely, Aldred prioritised his anarchist principles of freedom over the anti-anarchism of the Indians based on alignment with anti-British anti-imperialism. Stating his non-aligned position on the British left, he declared that, as an 'Anarchist Communist ... I stand for the overthrow by industrial-political anti-constitutional action of class society, and for the inauguration of a social era in which the government of persons shall have given place to the administration of things'. And Krishnavarma and the Indian nationalists, he continued, 'are so little in agreement with such an ideal'.⁴² Nevertheless, this ideological discrepancy did not deter Aldred from supporting the Indians, and he proceeded to offer a scathing indictment of British imperialism in India, linking the fate of Dhingra to the British working class:

he is not a time-serving executioner, but a Nationalist patriot, who, though his ideals are not their ideals, is worthy of the admiration of the workers, at home, who have as little to gain from the lick-spittling crew of Imperialist blood-sucking Capitalist parasites at home, as what the Nationalists have in India.⁴³

At the same time, he cautioned that 'this does not mean that [Krishnavarma's] propaganda will secure to the Indian workers the full produce of their labour, but it does mean that his propaganda is a menace to the security of British imperialism.

⁴² Aldred, 'Sedition!', 31.

⁴³ Ibid., 32.

To be logical and thorough that propaganda must involve political terrorism, industrial boycott and assassination'.⁴⁴ In other words, although he denounced anarchist propaganda through action and terrorism, Aldred displayed an awareness of different practices of propaganda to be deployed in different situations.

But it was his anarchist defence of written propaganda that led him to print *The Indian Sociologist*: 'I have undertaken the printing and publication of [Krishnavarma's] paper in defence of a Free Press', he wrote.⁴⁵ Drawing on a range of thinkers such as Helvetius, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Machiavelli, Milton and Beccaria and comparing the suppression of *The Indian Sociologist* and British imperialism in India to the Denshawai incident, the Paris Commune and the Chicago Martyrs, Aldred proceeded to challenge the accusations of sedition as unconstitutional: 'As sedition must involve the conspiring against the entire Constitution', he argued in defence of his belief that the state had corrupted the constitution and as evidence of his radical idea that the people are the constitution, 'it follows that to be guilty of seditious libel, the *Indian Sociologist* must militate against the interests of the working class in England, no less than against the interests of the governing class'.⁴⁶ The charge of sedition, in Aldred's mind, illuminated the class struggle that bourgeois constitutionalism was designed to conceal. However, more in the anarchist tradition of defiance and transgression, Aldred was also aware that, by printing and publishing *The Indian Sociologist*, he risked being prosecuted for sedition.⁴⁷ 'In the event of my being prosecuted to conviction of sedition', he wrote further, 'the Bakunin Press will continue to print and to issue the *Indian Sociologist* until that freedom is secured.'

⁴⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁷ For more on anarchism, 'propaganda by the word' and freedom of the press, see Franks, *Rebel Alliances*, 300–314.