Conclusion

D. H. Miller may have found India's accession to the League of Nations an 'anomaly among anomalies', and in many ways it was. Despite the admission of the Soviet Republics to the UN, the inclusion of colonies saw no large-scale normative shift towards the inclusion of colonies outside of the British Empire, with other member states viewing colonial membership as a form of British exceptionalism. Rather, the League existed in a transitory period, where the once tolerated norms of colonial representation at the UPU and ITU had begun to harden.

The admission of colonies to the League, which initially could only be accepted by craftily drafted amendments to the League Covenant would soon evolve into a key part of imperial politics. The idea enjoyed support from a broad range of British politicians across the three major political parties, and clear continuation after the collapse of Lloyd George's coalition. Reformers saw it as a means to evolve the Empire by engaging the collaboration of elites to participate in its operation, or at least to appear to do so, in the case of India. What had begun as a decision of expediency at the Paris Peace Conference, soon became part and parcel of Dominion status and established important constitutional precedents within the early conception of the British Commonwealth.

Much of this was achieved without the League of Nations' direct intervention, where the League became more of a site through which imperial policy could be played. The League's tolerance of colonial membership did not make it an active participant in the various forms of British colonial rule in the same way it governed over League

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Mandates through the Permanent Mandates Commission. Rather, the League, as a consequence of its design, was a forum through which Britain reinforced the legitimacy of its colonial rule internationally by including portions of its empire, without necessarily giving these new states the independence of action enjoyed by other League member states. What British policy-makers had possibly not conceived was how chaotic the policy of multiple representation was to become. The many tensions between different colonies of the Empire, especially between India and South Africa threatened to burst out at the League, jeopardizing the myth of the Empire's simultaneous multiplicity and unity at international conferences. This required constant British policing at the Imperial Conference. The position of *inter se* was often called anomalous by British Officials throughout the interwar period, and it bewildered foreign observers when intra-imperial disputes exhibited the Empire's dirty laundry at the League, undermining the notion of the imperial indivisibility.

The position of the League was perhaps even more complex for nationalist leaders. Most saw through the ruse as early as 1919. Britain's close control of its Dominions by harmonising League policy with imperial policy through the Imperial Conference aimed to solidify Britain's interests, dissuading an independent course of action. The League was thus initially perceived by many liberation movements as little more than a means for Britain to legitimise the Empire. Yet membership of the League was still highly desirable for the recognition it could potentially confer. The Free State navigated a more confrontational foreign policy through the League than other Dominions, attempting to use its place to propagate a sense of Irish nationhood and advance what it meant to be a Dominion. In Egypt, where leaders such as Zaghlul were wary of the League after Woodrow Wilson's lack of support, League of Nations membership was still highly coveted. Although Britain could act as an effective gatekeeper to who it wanted to include and exclude, the British were constantly anxious that Egyptian leaders would find a way to gain membership and challenge their control of Sudan. Where the British saw an organisation to safeguard imperial interests, nationalists saw an opportunity for international recognition and to potentially work towards greater independence.

Where the League of Nations was perhaps resented the most by nationalists, was in India. Its early League membership, monitored and gagged through *inter se* and its British-appointed delegations, did the least

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in delivering Indian nationalist demands for Dominion status. By the 1930s, many Indian elites condemned the organisation as the 'League of robbers' and Congress Leader Jawaharlal Nehru routinely criticised the League as an imperialist organisation and India's position within it as a 'farce'.[1] This would contrast with India's highly active role at the United Nations from 1946, where an independent Indian delegation operated inside an international organisation, that structurally, did not seem dissimilar to the League.[2]

India's presence at the League was certainly an exception to the rule even in 1919, and other non-self-governing colonies of its kind were not admitted after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. Despite the League having normative standards towards not admitting colonies unlike earlier international organisations, its definition of 'self-governing' could often ignore the evolving nature of colonial control. New criteria were established in the League's early years, that sought to filter out breakaway states from the Russian Empire, yet allowed the entry of Dominions and quasi-colonies such as Ireland and Egypt whose foreign policies were subject to British intervention.

The French, too, believed that their Protectorates were sufficiently self-governing to become member states after Ireland's admission to the League, but chose not to pursue their own policy of multiple representation. The decision not to pursue a policy of colonial representation in the French Empire as they had done half a century earlier in the UPU revealed the stark differences in colonial practise, and how intertwined League membership was with the ideals of the 'Third British Empire'. The French felt that the membership of their Protectorates at the League was an anathema to the unity of their Empire, with their presence at the League needing to be constantly monitored and policed. Rather than an attempt to build legitimacy through devolution and the creation of an international personality, albeit a curtailed one, French officers considered colonial representation to combat the British

[1] Legg, 'An International Anomaly?', 104; T. A. Keenleyside, 'The Indian Nationalist Movement and the League of Nations: Prologue to the United Nations', *India Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (1 July 1983): 281–98; Verma declared that by the 1930s Indian public opinion was 'hostile' to the League, Verma, *India and the League of Nations*, 56; More on Nehru's perspective on the League can be found at McQuade, 'Beyond an Imperial Foreign Policy?', 275–76.

[2] Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, ch. 4; McQuade, 'Beyond an Imperial Foreign Policy?', 288.

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Empire's growing predominance at the League Assembly. The French realised that their relationship with their colonies was different and did not share the same perceived cultural and racial ties that Britain did with its Dominions. Only after the Second World War would France attempt a similar re-conceptualization of their Empire at the Brazaville Conference in 1944 and through the creation of the l'Union francaise in 1946. French imperial federalists would often raise the Commonwealth model as a possible path towards decentring the French Empire.[3] Ultimately, the French would not pursue the policy of colonial representation at the United Nations either, with colonies and protectorates gaining a place at the UN after independence. Nonetheless, the decision whether or not to include French Protectorates at the League was France's prerogative, not the League's. Therefore, it was the decision of French colonial governors not to normalise the representation of colonies at international organisations beyond the British Empire, not the standards put in place by the League Covenant or its committees on admission, which could have potentially accepted them.

Yet what may have been perceived as an international and a political anomaly outside of the Empire was simply an evolution of the imperial ideal of indirect rule in an era of existential pressures caused by the First World War and national self-determination. Rather than an irregularity, it was an important hallmark of policies that would come to embody the new structure of the 'Third' British Empire, and would mark Britain's flexibility in innovating new ways to maintain the Empire. Colonial representation would provide an international face to aspiring protean nation-states, and was always accompanied by widely touted political devolutions such as the Government of India Act 1919, the Anglo-Irish Treaty, and the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. League membership provided the symbolic international content in a wider package of promises towards eventual statehood within the British Empire.

Rather than beating a retreat of imperialism, the architects of the 'Third' British Empire saw devolutions of power and membership of the League as building blocks towards a newly reconstructed Empire, reconciling the desire for autonomy and nationhood with the overarching

[3] Véronique Dimier, 'For a Republic "Diverse and Indivisible"? France's Experience from the Colonial Past', *Contemporary European History* 13, no. 1 (February 2004): 58.

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structure of British international hegemony. Symbols of allegiance, such as the demand to Irish representatives of an Oath of allegiance, or the desire to form a treaty with the nationalist Wafd, became more significant goals to secure than the machinery of government that was being devolved. Here, the League played a pivotal role in endowing these proto-states with important symbols of statehood: a nominal sense of foreign policy, and international personality, theoretically separate from Britain's.

The representation of British colonies at the League was the element that internationalised what Sinha calls the 'imperial-nationalizing conjuncture'.[4] Yet, the reality of the 'Third' British Empire that embodied this conjuncture was that it never completely superseded the other forms of Empire that existed alongside it. Large tracts of the British Empire in the Caribbean, Africa, and East Asia were never seriously considered for membership of the League. Although the fact that Britain did not attempt to flood the League with these potential colonial members as they did the ITU and UPU in the nineteenth century shows that maximising votes was certainly a secondary consideration, it reveals that governance of the 'Second' British Empire never truly disappeared. Much has yet to be investigated, as to whether nationalist leaders in these African and Asian colonies covetously looked to India, Ireland, and Egypt, for their own admission, or whether they dismissed admission to the League as a poisoned chalice.

But the evolution into the Third British Empire was always an unequal one. The notion of Dominion status and the role of the Dominions in imperial governance, was envisaged by both the Round Table and Dominion leaders, as being suitable only for Britain's European settler communities. Prior to the First World War, a similar status had not been anticipated for India, which saw marginal constitutional gains, or Ireland where debates over autonomous Home Rule rather than Dominion statehood raged in Britain. The growing nationalist movements in Ireland and India during the War, precipitated the need for constitutional change. The Dominions provided a roadmap, and it was a form of overspill from Dominion demands for greater foreign representation that saw India enter the Imperial Conference system, the Paris Peace Conference, and thus the League.

[4] Sinha, 'Premonitions of the Past', 828.

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India's accession to the Imperial Conference may have resembled a growing parity in its status with the Dominions, but India's accession to the League did little to advance India's independence, or secure a distinctly Indian foreign policy. Whilst the Dominions forged ahead, becoming effectively fully self-governing states within the British Empire by the late 1920s, a status formally ratified by the Statute of Westminster in 1931, the British ensured that India lagged behind in its constitutional development. Subject to investigations into India's preparedness for self-rule such as the all British 1927 Simon Commission and the 1930–32 Round Table conferences over India's future, India would not follow in the Dominions' wake, as the Irish Free State did. India thus represented a halfway house between the imperial desire to maintain the command and control of the Second Empire versus the pressures exerted by nationalist demands for Indian Home Rule. An Indian government increasingly draped with the symbols of statehood, and increasingly administered by Indians, was still helmed by British officials until independence.

For the theorists behind the ideals of the Third British Empire, such as Curtis and Smuts, the symbolic inclusion of India at the Imperial Conference and the League was an afterthought. Rather than India being the intended recipient of Dominion statehood, it was the reactions in India to colonial rule and the attack on the imperial subjecthood of Indians by the Dominions that precipitated reform. The idea of the Third British Empire had been predicated on the ideas of British nationalism and when not applicable such as in South Africa, European racial ideology. The perceived different cultural, civilizational, and racial background of India vis-a-vis Britain meant that despite symbolic devolutions of Indian statehood, India was not to govern the Empire but to be governed by it.

Finally, Egypt represented an even more extreme example which stood outside the Dominion building of the Third British Empire as a sustained example of informal empire. Here the imperial-nationalising conjuncture took place, but with more emphasis on 'Egypt's separate culture and status outside of' the British Empire. The decision to grant nominal independence was concluded nearly simultaneous with the creation of an Irish Dominion, which was denied the same symbols of independence. Despite a debate as to whether Egypt should be granted Dominion status, Egypt was never formally within the British Empire and was considered too 'alien' to join the Empire in 1921. For Egypt, this heightened the significance

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of the League as a symbol of its independence, a guarantor of its security and right to conduct foreign policy, but for Britain, Egypt's nominal independence meant there was less scope for harmonising its foreign relations with that of the Empire through the Imperial Conference. It was therefore essential for Britain that Egypt sign a treaty before it could enter the League.

Egypt revealed an evolution in the notion of the Third British Empire from exercising imperial rule through Dominion status to doing so through a nominally independent state. Pedersen claimed that the abandonment of the Iraq Mandate for a nominally independent kingdom bound by alliance and special interest represented an important evolution in the history of the British Empire's progression to a form of neo-colonialism.[5] However, Egypt arguably represented an earlier attempt at this form of control, though it was an attempt that failed to win the approval of an Egyptian government until 1936. Yet it showed how the politics of the Empire's steady-relinquishing of formal control was multi-faceted, operating in different ways in different spaces in both the formal and informal Empire.

The end of the Third British Empire and the League's role within it marked an era of transition for imperialism as it tried to reconcile itself with the ideals of national self-determination. The internationalisation of the politics of the British Empire at the League reveals British imperialism's propensity to engage with ideologies such as nationalism and internationalism that seem fundamentally at odds with it. The League created a space in which nationalist desires for international recognition could be subsumed into the larger imperial project. Colonial representation at the League, combined with other devolutions of power thus aimed to achieve some breathing space for the Empire in the interwar period.

Ultimately, the Round Table and the Smutsian ideal of the Empire had largely died by the end of the Second World War. The symbolic ties that had held the British Empire in the interwar period, were often dispensed with by newly independent states. Some symbols, such as the Monarchy and even the Imperial Conference, which would morph into the Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference from 1944 onwards, were retained by newly independent states, although Republicanism soon

[5] Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 284–85.

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became the norm, with Ireland and India discarding the Monarchy in 1949 and 1950 respectively. Ironically, the symbols of the early Commonwealth which had been created to maintain the fiction of statehood within the Empire, had by the 1950s become tokens for Britain of the Empire's continued persistence within its former colonies.

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